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# **IMAGINING ROMAN BRITAIN**

## **VICTORIAN RESPONSES**

### **TO A ROMAN PAST**

**By Virginia Hoselitz**

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Classics and Ancient History.

**September 2002**

**(74,500 words)**

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is about the way in which antiquarians in the mid-nineteenth century re-discovered the Romano-British past. In a detailed study of antiquarian activity in four areas of provincial England and Wales, I examine the part this discovery played in social change and contemporary debates.

I look at the processes through which national identity and Britain's role as an imperial power were influenced and shaped by comparisons with the Roman Empire and, how, as a result, alternative models of national origins were developed.

I examine the way in which traditional social organisations appealed to the Roman past as a justification for their authority and used the objects associated with the classical Roman heritage to maintain their standing within society. The established ruling groups sought to maintain their position in the face of challenges posed by new ideas and an increasingly professional middle class. In the ensuing debates, the pre-eminence of textual accounts of the past was questioned and the foundations were laid for the new science of archaeology based on material evidence.

I discuss the importance of artefacts as the means whereby the historical imagination could be stimulated and used to create stories about the past with which individuals and communities could identify. Finally, I discuss the central role of historical remains and objects in debates concerning ownership and preservation.

I conclude that at a local level, the evidence of the Roman past was used to maintain traditional social structures and enhance the prestige of the local elite in a process that was relatively unconcerned with national identity. Local antiquarians were willing to use all kinds of evidence, historical, legendary and material to emphasise the importance of their locality and their position within it. In a separate process, aspiring professionals supported each other in their attempts to develop new methods of examining the past that would differentiate them from the amateurs in the provinces.

## **DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I must thank my supervisors, Catharine Edwards and Neville Morley, for their tolerance and for the understanding with which they guided a stray social scientist around the complexities of the classical world and historical research.

I dedicate this thesis to Steve, who lived with the Romans and Victorians for many years; organised trips to Roman remains: sorted out frequent computer crises; and corrected my grammar. I could not have done it without him.



## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

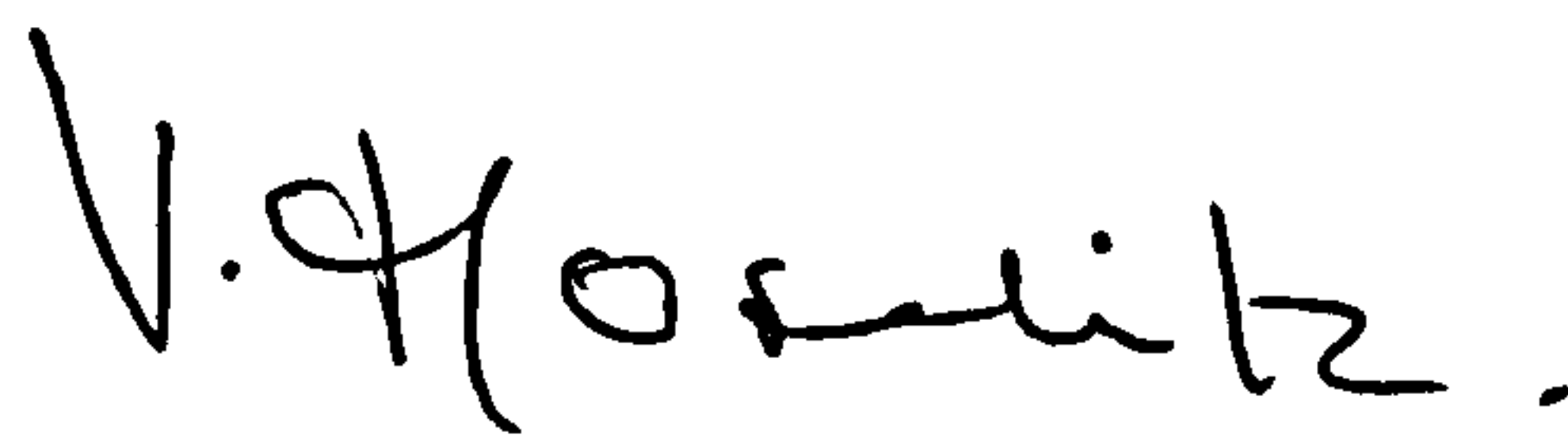
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Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent the University of Bristol.

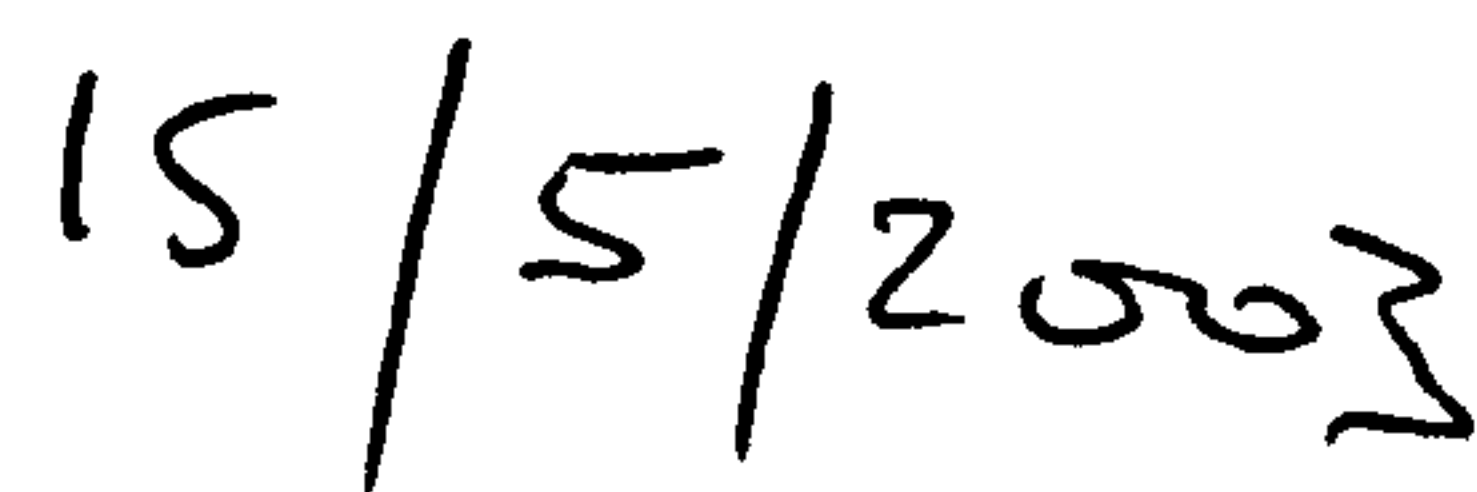
This dissertation has not been presented to any other university for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. Hoselitz'.

Virginia Hoselitz

Date:

A handwritten date in black ink, appearing to read '15/5/2003'.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

“To study how England and Englishmen came to be what they are, we must study first, and well, the history of the Roman occupation.”<sup>1</sup>

This comment by a local antiquarian in 1858 highlights the importance attached to many in mid-Victorian Britain to the relationship between the contemporary world and its Roman past. This thesis is about that relationship: it is about ideas and their social context and the way in which ideas evolve and develop in response to events and changing social structures.

In an era of almost unprecedented change, in which the familiar seemed to be crumbling, the study of the past offered both a vehicle for exploring new ideas and a way of reinforcing social structures through which individuals could maintain a sense of place and belonging.

My study has two main aims. The first is to give an account of how British antiquarians in the middle of the nineteenth century constructed a new picture of Roman Britain. Whereas during the eighteenth century most antiquarians had pictured Roman Britain as a small and insignificant island on the edge of a powerful empire, during the course of the nineteenth century, they came to regard it as an active and important place in its own right. In the process the antiquarians developed new methods of working and found different ways of conceptualising the Romano-British relationship and the part it had played in national development.

My second aim is to investigate the interaction between these antiquarian activities and the social context in which industrialisation and urbanisation were causing old social structures and long-established authority to be questioned. By focusing on Roman Britain rather than Imperial Rome, the antiquarians' activities brought about a shift in the way both were perceived that was paralleled by subtle changes in British social structure. The work of the antiquarians elevated Roman Britain – at least in their eyes – so that it grew in significance. This then was echoed in their whole approach which challenged the more aesthetically-based image of the classical past shared by the governing elite.

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<sup>1</sup> E.A.S.J., Vol. I (1858) p.103



In Contesting Cultural Authority, Frank Turner describes the intellectual debates between upholders of traditional values and those seeking new ways of understanding the world. He describes a process in which “groups of Victorians attempted to establish foundations for new mental outlooks, to challenge existing authority, to propose themselves as new authorities, or to resist the challenge of new comers and to preserve earlier ideas and values in novel guises and institutional arrangements.”<sup>2</sup> He argues that “classical scholarship provided a vehicle for debating modern developments and introducing modern ideas into the educational curriculum and the larger culture.”<sup>3</sup> Other scholars have also discussed the importance of historical studies in this period and, like Turner, they have emphasised the role of such studies in providing both ‘a safe area’ and a vocabulary in which new and challenging ideas could be discussed. For instance, Philippa Levine argues that historical debate “ranked alongside the sciences as the dominant intellectual resource which shaped Victorian culture, providing the means to justify, to deplore, to praise or to abuse, to determine the means and portents of changes affecting the structure of society so profoundly in this period.”<sup>4</sup> The study of the classical world and texts was particularly useful for this purpose as it offered a body of ideas, stories and characters that were well known to all men who had received the normal education of the period. Norman Vance stresses the value of this common pool of knowledge when he argues that “Rome presented challenging paradigms and reference points, ways of making sense of a chaotic and volatile present.”<sup>5</sup> The mechanisms whereby the study of the past could fulfil this role are suggested by Sam Smiles in his analysis of the historical imagination in the first half of the nineteenth century. He argues that historians and antiquarians “were capable of mobilising a sense of historical genealogy, provincial pride and cultural distinction of considerable importance in a world where the pressures of

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<sup>2</sup> Turner (1993) p.xi

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.xii. On the place of classics in British education see Stray (1998)

<sup>4</sup> Levine (1986) p.1. On the overlap between arts and sciences in this period see Beer (1983). She suggests that the arts offered science and metaphors at a time when they had not yet developed their own.

<sup>5</sup> Vance (1997) p.5

industrialisation were uprooting communities, engendering social mobility and upsetting the settled values vested in the old aristocratic and agricultural orders.”<sup>6</sup>

John Burrow’s examination of the relationship between Victorian historians’ work and the world in which they operated suggests one way to analyse the link between the two. His work is based on the premise that “one of the ways in which a society reveals itself, and its assumptions and beliefs about its own character and destiny, is by its attitudes to and uses of its past.”<sup>7</sup> A similar premise is the basis of Smiles’ analysis of the romantic imagination. By tracing changes in the images of the ancient Britons and the Romans and the relationship between them and relating these to contemporary early Victorian society, Smiles illustrates some of the intellectual changes of the time. Similarly, Turner’s analysis of the differing accounts of events in the Roman Republic by nineteenth-century historians provides a literary example of the same process.<sup>8</sup>

In this thesis I have used these insights to inform my investigation into mid-nineteenth century responses to the Romano-British past. The descriptions by these antiquarian authors of the Romans in Britain and their adversaries, the Ancient Britons and the Saxons, illustrate some of the ways in which the antiquarians thought both about themselves and the society in which they lived.

One aspect of the Victorians’ fascination with the past was the proliferation of specialist organisations concerned with its study, but only Levine examines these organisations in any detail. She argues that the change in the way history was studied was paralleled by the creation of new organisational structures at both local and national level. In her analysis of the three related fields of history, archaeology and antiquarianism, she points out that despite having similar interests they were separated by different traditions and methods. As time went on and government-funded institutions were established to further historical research in the universities, the Public Record Office and the British Museum, the differences were exacerbated by the attempts of the workers within those establishments to

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<sup>6</sup> Smiles (1994) p.24

<sup>7</sup> Burrow (1981) pp.1-2

<sup>8</sup> Turner (1993) pp.231-261.

gain recognition for themselves as professionals. There is a considerable body of work suggesting that the developing professions played a major part in assisting the middle classes to play a more important and authoritative role in many aspects of British life. This was especially so in the case of the emerging sciences, whose middle-class adherents used their specialist knowledge as a way of distinguishing themselves from the traditional ruling upper class.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the antiquarians who remained outside the centralised, metropolitan organisations were increasingly regarded as amateur and their activities sidelined. This was particularly true of the membership of local groups set up specifically to investigate the history of their own locality.<sup>10</sup> One of Levine's conclusions is that the membership of these local groups was largely restricted to the middle and upper classes and that their social characteristics were similar in most respects to the ruling elites in their area. The membership of the societies overlapped significantly with the membership of the other bodies in their respective areas, including local government, thus building up a "security of class interest" with which to maintain the status quo.<sup>11</sup>

Levine's work presents an overall picture of organisational changes across the country and over a considerable period of time (1838-1886). Her discussion of local activities and institutions is therefore unavoidably general and lacks the more detailed picture that a closer examination can reveal. My intention has been to fill in the colour and the depth of Levine's outline and thus to reveal more clearly the interplay of cultural and social factors involved. I therefore decided to examine the membership and activities of four groups between 1840 and 1860. By using their own accounts in journals, newspaper reports, minutes of meetings and letters, I have attempted to assess their responses to Roman Britain. I was interested in examining the way in which they positioned themselves, both in terms of their Roman heritage and within the wider contemporary society.

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<sup>9</sup> See Porter (1978), Jann (1983), Turner (1993) p.176-189. In Huxley, The Devil's Disciple (1994), Desmond presents an illuminating study of the way in which these factors operated in the career of one individual. In particular he draws attention to the contrast between the new professionals or 'knowledge brokers' such as Huxley, and wealthy amateurs such as Darwin. (p.221)

<sup>10</sup> In Appendix IV Levine lists fifty-seven such local societies established in England between 1834 and 1886. Levine (1986) p.182-183.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.4



One further general point needs to be made. Most of the work on nineteenth century scholars in the historical field refers to either ‘historians’ or ‘archaeologists’. The clearest way of distinguishing between the two groups is by their methodologies, with historians dealing mainly with texts and chronological accounts and archaeologists with artefacts and accounts of systems. However contemporary descriptions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholars are more likely to refer to ‘antiquarians’.<sup>12</sup> Momigliano has described an antiquarian as one “who is interested in historical facts without being interested in history”.<sup>13</sup> In other words rather than seeking historical explanations through tracking changing events, antiquarians were concerned with amassing and classifying discrete pieces of information and hence were interested above all in the permanent and unchanging objects of everyday life. By the middle of the nineteenth century, although their techniques were still rudimentary by modern standards, they began to develop the methodology that would result in the new science of archaeology. The irony was that, the more specialised they became in their excavating methods and collecting techniques, the less they resembled old-style antiquarians. It is probably significant that those antiquarians in my study who were most anxious to proclaim themselves as ‘scientists’ and their activities as ‘scientific’ were also those who called themselves ‘archaeologists’. But in this study I will call them antiquarians: it is the term which best describes the activities of most of the provincial workers.

### *Roman Britain*

Studies of changing cultural values in the middle of the nineteenth century need to touch on the influence of Imperial Rome. Such was the dominance of Rome and its associated artefacts as important ‘markers’ of status and position within the cultural and social elite that any discussion of cultural values and ideas has to take Roman influence into account.<sup>14</sup> According to Turner, Victorian classicism is a topic, “which held a centrality for the intellectual experience for the educated Victorian

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<sup>12</sup> See for instance Piggott (1976), (1985) and (1989).

<sup>13</sup> Momigliano (1994) p.54

<sup>14</sup> See Vance (1997) especially Chapter One on The Persistence of Rome; Edwards (1999); Turner (1993) especially Part III, Modern and Ancients.

elite that it is difficult for scholars at the end of the twentieth century even to begin to comprehend.”<sup>15</sup> But while there have been a number of books on responses to Rome, there has been relatively little attention paid to responses to Roman Britain as a separate subject in its own right. It is significant that of the works already cited as important studies of Roman influence on Victorian Britain, only Vance has a short section on Roman Britain and that is mainly concerned with the ruins that “testified to Rome’s imperial past.”<sup>16</sup> Smiles’ study presents convincing visual evidence of changing attitudes to Rome, but as his title The Image of Antiquity suggests, he is primarily concerned with the romantic representation of the Ancient Britons and their relation with the occupying power of Rome, rather than with the Romano-Britons themselves. They remain an obscure group whose presence is usually only detectable in discussions concerning the extent to which Roman ideas and customs were adopted by the indigenous British population: a process usually described as ‘Romanisation’. I feel a degree of sympathy with the antiquarians I have been studying, as we both argue for neglected aspects of the past to receive their due regard. Just as they appealed for the artefacts of Roman Britain to be preserved, I would like the importance of Roman Britain in the historical imagination of the nineteenth-century antiquarians to be recognised as worthy of further study.

### The Case Studies

In order to achieve a more specific and detailed appreciation of Victorian responses to Roman Britain, I needed to identify places that had experienced a significant Roman presence and had also attracted the attention of the Victorian antiquarians. I wanted to use locations where the Roman remains had stimulated the local people to excavate and to establish institutions, either local societies or museums. Inevitably, I needed groups which had left some indication of their activities in the form of records, journals and buildings. In addition, I wanted groups that had been active over a similar period and therefore might be supposed to have experienced at least some of the same social pressures. To ascertain which sites met these

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<sup>15</sup> Turner (1993) p.284

<sup>16</sup> Vance (1997) p.22-23

criteria I read the contemporary national archaeological journals.<sup>17</sup> I am aware that this might have excluded some areas that met my conditions, but had not attracted national coverage in the same way. But my impression has been that most local antiquarians did report their findings to the national bodies, either by writing reports, or by attracting visitors who fulfilled this reporting role.

Using these criteria, I chose four sites. Caerleon in South Wales, once a legionary headquarters, where the Caerleon Archaeological Association was established in 1847 and a museum opened in 1850. Cirencester, a major urban centre in Roman Britain, where significant mosaic pavements were discovered in 1849 for which a purpose built museum was built in 1856; Colchester, the original capital of Roman Britain and one of the sites of the Boudican revolt, where the Essex Archaeological Society started in 1850 and a museum began to be established in 1856; and Chester, another legionary headquarters, where the Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society was founded in 1849.

I obtained a broad overview of activity and the personalities involved by reading the nineteenth century antiquarian journals and modern histories.<sup>18</sup> I then visited each of the four locations and spoke to local historians, museum curators, librarians and archaeologists. In Caerleon, Colchester and Chester, where local societies are still active, I was able to see unpublished documents, including letters and minutes of meetings. In Cirencester, where no such group had ever existed, I was given access to the museum storeroom, which contained boxes of uncatalogued material dating back to the early years of the museum. In all four locations, the local history libraries hold extensive collections of local interest, such as back copies of journals and newspapers and proceedings of other bodies in their town, such as Mechanics' Institutes and reading rooms and libraries. I also visited other early museums: Saffron Walden, founded in 1838 and the Syer Cuming's collection in Lambeth.

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<sup>17</sup> B.A.A.J., A.J., Archaeologia, G.M.

<sup>18</sup> For example the new Victoria County History series is useful in providing general background and all four areas are still attracting extensive archaeological attention whose reports usually contain a fleeting glance at how it all began. More specific references will be found in the case study chapters.



In his discussion of the difficulties presented by historical research, Alan Macfarlane points out the danger of putting too much reliance on the published words of the leaders and most active individuals. He calls this group “the historically visible minority” and suggests that one way of avoiding this difficulty is to get as detailed a picture as is possible of specific communities or groups.<sup>19</sup>

Chance plays a significant role in the way in which historical evidence is preserved and can be accessed. Some of it is in the form of official records such as minutes and proceedings, which have been published and are therefore in the public domain. However, where they were not published, it was serendipity whether they were saved or not. In some instances, such as in Caerleon and the original Colchester Society, they have survived: largely due to the fact that the two societies themselves have continued to flourish. But the existence of other records can only be surmised because of ‘throw-away’ remarks in contemporary accounts.<sup>20</sup> It is clear that there was often more going on ‘behind the scenes’ than the official records would suggest, but this is rarely recorded.<sup>21</sup>

### Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 offers a general discussion of the cultural ideas and traditions that formed the context within which the antiquarians operated. I examine changing ideas about the classical texts and developments in the study of artefacts, both classical and pre-historic. I am particularly concerned with the way the classical world and its texts and artefacts were symbolic of traditional authority and were used as markers of civilised living and entitlement to a position within the ruling elite. I look at shifts in the way the world was conceptualised, particularly under the influence of the work of geologists and scientists such as Darwin. Amid these shifting intellectual sands the classical world, with its apparent order and

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<sup>19</sup> Macfarlane (1977) p.130. A view shared by Asa Briggs, see *Victorian People* (1965) p. 16

<sup>20</sup> For instance in Chester, Watkin refers to “Massie notes, which I have recently inspected”, but he does not say where and I have not been able to find them in the Chester records. (Watkin (1886) p.240) Watkin comments on the difficulty of finding evidence. He ascribes this to ignorance of the laws of treasure trove amongst ‘the lower classes’. “Amongst the more educated classes, however, the reasons for this reticence are far different, and generally more selfish.” (preface p.v)

<sup>21</sup> One example of this is discussed in the Caerleon Chapter concerning the style chosen for the museum building..

familiarity, could be seen as offering a degree of certainty to which the more conservative could cling.

The following four chapters discuss each of the sites that constitute my case studies. I examine in greater detail group structure and membership and the extent to which the profiles of local groups were similar to, or differed from, society at large. I assess whether these groups were used as vehicles for upward social mobility by those outside the ruling group, or, alternatively, were used as a means of maintaining the status quo by members of the governing elite. In each area I give a picture of the locality and any national events that had a particular relevance for that location.

In the remaining three chapters I discuss some of the main implications of my research, which, in the broadest terms, can be seen as concerned with the way in which individuals identify themselves and the manner in which those identities shift and change as a result of cultural and social changes. I discuss my results in three sections: national identity, social identity and personal identity. However, I do not want to give the impression that they are totally separate entities, operating independently of one another. In fact quite the reverse is the case, since they overlap and influence one another in a complex manner.

In the chapter on national identity I look at alternative theories of national origins and in particular, at the way these were affected and altered by Britain's increasingly important role as an Imperial power. It was in the context of the possible implications of what it meant to be British and an imperial power that comparisons with the Roman Empire were most apposite and, potentially, most disturbing. But my findings in Caerleon demonstrate that there was no one national identity that could be used to describe the whole United Kingdom and this would suggest that further detailed studies would bring to light other fault lines in a presumed common identity.<sup>22</sup>

Despite other work suggesting an increased sense of national pride during this period, what I observed in all four areas, was the past being used to enhance the

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<sup>22</sup> Alan Kidd (1998) argues that local and regional loyalties ensured a great range of regional and cultural diversity. (p. xxix)

importance of an arguably local identity. The antiquarians frequently declared that their findings lent weight to and justified local stories and myths that put national events and characters on their particular patch.

In the chapter on social structure, I examine the extent to which the profile of the local antiquarian groups reflected that of the local society. Levine's work suggests a social homogeneity in these groups, both between the individual members and between the group and society at large. Generally my findings were similar, but greater detail did allow some significant differences to emerge, particularly on how those who did not fit the usual pattern were dealt with. To some extent their inclusion or otherwise would seem to have depended upon how much they varied from the accepted norm. But the cohesiveness of the local society would also appear to have played a part; the less cohesive the society, the more the antiquarian group tried to exclude outsiders. The emphasis on local pride and identity appears to have been used to enhance the position of the ruling body, both of the antiquarian group and in the wider society.

I also examine the activities of a group of individuals who did not conform and who chose to work together, reinforcing their mutual sense of being excluded. Significantly several members of this group were among those striving to build a professional career out of their antiquarian activities. I assess the extent to which the mass of working people were affected by these cultural developments, although given the lack of evidence, this can only be supposition.

In Chapter 9 I examine the dual nature of objects, as evidence of the past and as symbols in the present. I am interested in the way objects can be used to define individual identity and symbolise their place in society. It was in this social context that the power of classical objects and their associations with traditional values of taste and authority was most obvious. This power was largely responsible for the desire to own such markers of prestige and to display them prominently in their owners' homes, and this in turn fuelled the market for classical objects and a brisk trade in forged artefacts. The symbolism of objects was also useful as 'pegs' around which imaginative re-constructions could be built and which in turn could be used to aid individual identification with the classical past. Indeed, I argue, the enduring power and attraction of these objects was (and still is) due to their suggestive nature and their associations.



## **CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE SCENE**

THE philosopher John Mill believed that “the idea of comparing one’s own age with former ages... is an idea essentially belonging to an age of change. Before men begin to think long and hard on the peculiarities of their own times, they must have begun to think that those times are, or are destined to be, distinguished in a very remarkable manner from the times which proceeded them.”<sup>1</sup> Whether they were regarded as a challenge to be welcomed or a threat to be avoided, it is evident that change and the effects of change were a major pre-occupation in the early Victorian period. Thackeray likened the changes to living in two different worlds. “It was only yesterday; but what a gulf between now and then! Then was the old world. Stagecoaches, riding horses, pack horses, highwaymen, knights in armour, Norman invaders, Roman legions, Druids, Ancient Britons painted blue, all these belong to the old period... But your railroad starts the new era, and we of a certain age belong to the new time and the old one. We are of the time of chivalry as well as the Black Prince of Sir Walter Manny. We are of the age of steam.”<sup>2</sup> Thackeray was born in 1811 and his words draw attention to the feeling that he did indeed live in a world that was significantly different from the past. By emphasising the stability of the past in which changes had occurred only slowly (at the rate of a horse in fact), and contrasting this with the speed of the railways, he implies a rate of change that could not be ignored.

Although Thackeray was not making a value judgement, he was describing a situation that must have been recognised by many of his contemporaries, as Thomas Phillips, the mayor of Newport pointed out. “Changes have been accomplished far more extensive and important than are usually witnessed by an entire generation of the sons of man. Around and about us opinions may be discerned which involve not merely the machinery of government, but the very framework of society. These opinions are not confined to the closets of the studios, but pervade the workshop and the market place and interest the men who

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<sup>1</sup>John S. Mill, The Examiner, 9<sup>th</sup>, January 1831, pp.20-21.

<sup>2</sup>W.M. Thackeray, “De Juventute” (1860) in Roundabout Papers, Works, Vol. 12, p.232.



fill our crowded thoroughfares.”<sup>3</sup> Some regarded the changes with foreboding. For instance, the antiquarian Richard Neville described the development of the railways as, “like the fibres of a stupendous network. They gradually over spread with ruthless meshes the surface of our once beautiful island. In removing hills, up raising mounds, diverting the streams, no obstacle impedes, nor love and veneration for the sites of the old abbeys, churches, burying grounds and ancient cities with their records of the past. Even the lordly domain in all its present glory restrains not their sway. Truly may they be termed ‘the universal levellers’ and literally no respecters of persons or property.”<sup>4</sup> Neville’s words convey the sense of something lost; not just the material remains of the past, but the stability and continuity they were seen to embody. Bulwer-Lytton voiced upper class fears that the traditional social structures which had appeared to maintain relative stability in the past was threatened. “Old opinions, feelings, ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change.”<sup>5</sup>

The changes manifested themselves in many different ways. There were social changes, such as population growth, and urban development on an unprecedented scale. There were also demands for political change, prompted initially by the example of the French Revolution, but made more pressing by the demands for reform of the urbanised working class. I describe these social and political changes briefly in the next section. I then look in more detail at some of the intellectual and cultural debates that were central to the study of the past; namely the re-appraisal of the Celtic past, the development of new classification systems and the influence these had on the British Museum. However it has to be stressed that all these changes were interrelated in a complex way and any attempt to distinguish between them is simplistic and misleading. My argument is that in such a changeable world

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<sup>3</sup> Phillips (1849) p.48.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Neville (1848) p.88. Neville was the eldest son of a noble family. He took up archaeology when poor health forced his retirement from the army. He excavated several Roman sites including Great Chesterford in Essex.

<sup>5</sup> E. Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English (1833) p.281. Lytton was a member of the Young England Group, Tories who deplored the laissez faire attitudes of the industrialists and advocated a return to an idealised past in which everyone knew their place and the ruling class looked after the interests of the workers.

the study of the past could offer lessons and inspiration to those who welcomed it and a sense of continuity to those who feared it.

### Social and Political Change

The population of Britain rose from 24.1 million in 1831 to 27.3 million in 1851.<sup>6</sup> Although the causal relationship between industrial change and population growth has been widely debated, the contemporary perception that there were too many mouths to feed caused real concern. The economic slump that followed the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 and the catastrophic famine in Ireland in the 1840s were just two of the events which appeared to justify the pessimistic predictions of Malthus that population growth would outstrip agricultural production.<sup>7</sup> One example of this concern is editorial comment in the Illustrated London News in 1848. "With a rapidly increasing population and trade augmenting at a slower ratio than the number of mouths to be fed... the question of the subsistence of our people becomes of the utmost urgency."<sup>8</sup>

Another important change was the growth in the number of people living in urban areas. It has been estimated that in 1800, 24 per cent of the British population lived in towns of over 10,000, representing the largest urban population in Europe.<sup>9</sup> By 1851 the census revealed that for the first time there were more people living in towns than in the country.<sup>10</sup> The social consequences of these changes are difficult to assess.<sup>11</sup> Even after the appalling conditions in which many urban workers lived were highlighted by reports such as Edwin Chadwick's Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population (1842), local councils were often reluctant

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<sup>6</sup> These figures are from B.R. Mitchell & P. Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge 1962) and cited in Harrison (1971) p.23

<sup>7</sup> T.R. Malthus, *Essay on Population* (1798) See Daunton (1995) pp.1-10

<sup>8</sup> Illustrated London News, 22<sup>nd</sup>, July 1848. In 1845 Disraeli used one of the characters in *The Two Nations* to express the anxiety about over population. "Awful, tis the most solemn thing since the Deluge. What kingdom can stand against it? Why, go to your history and see the fall of the great Roman Empire...Every now and then there came two or three hundred thousand strangers out of the forests...They come to us every year and in greater numbers. What are your invasions of the barbarous nations, your Goths and Visigoths, your Lombards and Huns, to our population returns." Disraeli (1845) p.119.

<sup>9</sup> The figure is from E.A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth* (1987) Cited in Daunton (1995) p.137

<sup>10</sup> See Morris & Rodger (1993) pp.2-3. They argue that "this transition in cities rapidly achieved in the 1840s and 1850s represented a new urban frontier." (p.22)

<sup>11</sup> For some discussion of the factors involved see Daunton (1995) pp.252-258



to act. There was local suspicion of the centralising tendency of government. One view is that “the majority of borough corporations were closed Tory cliques, which could use their assets for the benefits of members rather than the inhabitants of the town.”<sup>12</sup> Again, it is not the facts that are important here as much as the perception. ‘The Condition of England Question’, as it became known, prompted several novels that brought these poor living conditions to the attention of a wide audience.<sup>13</sup> There was also a belief among some observers that the move to the towns had broken down the traditional patterns of authority in long-established rural communities. Neville, for instance, thought that “the children have forgotten the stock whence they got their origin, the memory of deeds and words, so prominent in the lives of their forefathers, survives but in story.”<sup>14</sup> His comment is another example of contemporary upper class concerns.

Given those concerns it is perhaps not surprising that there should have been a growing fear of working class unrest. This was not new. Revolution in France and 25 years of war had led the British government to restrict meetings and ban the publication of what it regarded as seditious material. But after 1815 these fears had continued as the de-mobilisation of thousands of men and a series of poor harvests led to widespread discontent and some ugly incidents such as the Peterloo Massacre in 1819.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Phillips described the new militancy in the mining towns of South Wales. “In our new and neglected communities, Chartism is found in its worst manifestations, not as an adhesion to political dogmas, but of an indication of that class antagonism which proclaims the rejection of our common Christianity.”<sup>16</sup> The hopes created by the 1832 Reform Act were dashed by the realisation that power remained in the hands of the upper classes. The result was a rising demand for further and more far reaching political reforms, which took an

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.256. Colchester is one example of such a council.

<sup>13</sup> ‘The Condition of England Question’, as a description of urban poverty, was first used by Carlyle in Chartism (1840). The novels were Disraeli’s Sybil (1845), Mrs Gaskell’s Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855) and Dickens’ Hard Times (1854),

<sup>14</sup> R. Neville (1847) p.48.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Colley has highlighted the threat that these de-mobilised troops with their knowledge of weapons and fighting were thought to represent. There were no further voluntary troops reinstated until “the socially tranquil 1850s. (Colley (1986) p.115. See also Colley (1992) pp.283-285, pp.321-324.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, (1849) p.50. Phillips was the mayor of Newport who organised the resistance to the Chartist rally in the town in 1839.

increasingly violent turn.<sup>17</sup> Agitation came to a head in 1848 with a huge demonstration in London, as a result of which troops barricaded Downing Street and the Thames bridges and the Houses of Parliament were provisioned for a siege.

This fearful response has to be seen in context. Many people still remembered the French Revolution and Napoleon's dictatorship which followed. 1848 became known as the year of revolution. In France the elected government was overturned and replaced by another Napoleon and there were uprisings in Austria, Germany and Italy. An editorial in the Illustrated London News declared that "the great revolution of February 1848 in Paris has spread like an electric shock and shaken the whole of Europe... every reflecting man in England must feel that the events on the Continent indirectly affect us."<sup>18</sup> It did not happen in Britain, but the fear that it could was real and should not be underestimated.<sup>19</sup>

In retrospect, the middle years of the century are seen as a time of confidence in Britain, epitomised by the Great Exhibition in 1851. But potentially divisive undercurrents remained. The landowners, the traditional ruling class, still continued to monopolise power, in spite of pressure from the newly wealthy manufacturers. The greater complexity of manufacturing facilitated the growth of a number of new professions, whose membership felt excluded from positions of authority. These divisions were frequently exacerbated by religious differences, as many manufacturing families were, initially at least, dissenters.<sup>20</sup> The exclusion of non-Anglicans from the universities and the system of patronage used to fill places in the civil service and Army meant that many of these 'new men' continued to be excluded from many positions of authority. Consequently there was a rising tide of demands for such places to be awarded on merit rather than on social contacts. The demands increased as the Crimean War (1853-1856) revealed frightening

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<sup>17</sup> There were Chartist rallies in Colchester and in Newport a Chartist march resulted in clashes with armed soldiers in which seven people died.

<sup>18</sup> I.L.N. 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1848

<sup>19</sup> See Royle (2000) Royle's title, *Reflections on the threat of revolution 1789-1848* is based on the title of Edmund Burke's influential book *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790)

<sup>20</sup> Morris & Roger (1993) argue that the political divisions between Tory and Whig were "identified with, though not identical to, the sectarian split between Nonconformists and Anglicans." (p. 33)



inefficiencies in public administration that were blamed for defeat on the battlefield and the death of huge numbers of soldiers from disease.<sup>21</sup>

### Cultural and Intellectual Changes

During the eighteenth century many of the upper class and ruling elite in Britain shared an interest in and a knowledge of antiquity, based on the classical texts and the art and architecture of Greece and Rome. In Second Characters or the Language of Forms (1714) Lord Shaftesbury argued that the moral virtues of truth, honesty, order and beauty exemplified by great Roman figures, were demonstrated in the writing and arts of classical antiquity. Roman examples were used as models with which to argue the respective merits or disadvantages of different forms of government, both republican and imperial.<sup>22</sup> In this political and social climate, the members of the ruling oligarchy in Britain could conceive of themselves as the modern equivalents of Roman citizens upholding ancient values.<sup>23</sup>

The education of upper class boys was heavily influenced by these ideas. The public school curriculum was dominated by the classical texts to the exclusion of almost everything else and they remained an essential part of the teaching at Oxford and Cambridge until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Other subjects that might be thought more useful for a future career were considered unnecessary, as it was thought unlikely that these boys would have to work for a living.<sup>25</sup> The concentration of public school education in just a few schools meant that the young men shared an ideology based on the classics and that they had a similar social

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<sup>21</sup> Dissenters were legally disqualified from most public positions and were only gradually admitted into some of the traditional bastions of established authority. They were not admitted into Oxford and Cambridge until 1854 and 1856 respectively. Examinations for entrance into the civil service was introduced in 1855 and for the army in 1857.

<sup>22</sup> See Turner (1993) pp.231-262, Weinbrot (1993), Dowling (1985)

<sup>23</sup> See Philip Ayres (1997) Chapter on The Oligarchy of Virtue.

<sup>24</sup> See Stray (1998), What this concentration on the classics meant in practice is to be gathered from a letter written by the sixteen year old John Clayton, (later town clerk of Newcastle and archaeologist of Hadrian's Wall) to his father in 1808 describing his studies at Uppingham School. He described a curriculum which consisted almost entirely of readings of Greek and Latin authors and their translation into English. Typical lessons for a day would be, "Monday, in the mornings we read Homer and Theocritus in turn, and in the afternoon Cicero's Tusculan Disputations, together with a portion of Virgil's Aeneid, or the Odes of Horace, besides which we write a Latin theme." Wallis Budge (1903) p.21. Clayton was described as having, "a very useful knowledge of Greek and Latin classics, and to the very end of his life he was able to quote long passages from them with great correctness." (Ibid. p.1).

<sup>25</sup> Gathorne-Hardy (1977) pp.136-143. "From the late 1860s the great ice floe of the classics began to crack." (p.140)

experience of school life. A leading churchman's description of the advantages of a public school education demonstrates quite clearly the social divide that such a system represented. "It enables us to look down with contempt on those who have not shared its advantages, and also fits us for places of emolument not only in this world, but the next."<sup>26</sup>

In the wealthiest families, this education was completed by the Grand Tour whose purpose was to give the men first-hand experience of the classical sights they had learnt about in school, especially in Rome and, after its discovery in 1747, Pompeii.<sup>27</sup> For some, the tour was a formative and long-lasting experience.<sup>28</sup> But even those without great artistic or literary talents and imagination were able to buy antiquities and paintings. Such acquisitions were an essential part of the Grand Tour for, suitably displayed in the gentleman's home, they were a visual indication of his education and taste.<sup>29</sup> A collection of antiquities was a symbol of the owner's place in society and indicated that he was a natural heir of Rome and ruler of Britain.

A portrait of Charles Townley in his library painted by Zoffany in 1783 is a good example of the way in which ownership of classical antiquities was used to convey a social message {Plate I, p.254}. He is shown surrounded by antique marbles such as the Discobolus and the Cannibal.<sup>30</sup> Also pictured are two other collectors

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Levine (1986) p.161. A more well-meaning, although paternalistic, description was given by Lord Brougham when he was inaugurated as Rector of Glasgow University. "Store your minds with the exquisite learning of former ages, that you may always possess within yourselves sources of rational and refined enjoyment, which will enable you to set at nought the grosser pleasures of sense; whereof other men are slaves; and so imbue yourselves with the sound philosophy of later days, forming yourselves to the virtuous habits which are its legitimate offspring, that you may walk unhurt through the toils which await you, and may look down upon the ignorance and error that surround you, not with lofty and supercilious contempt, but with the vehement desire of enlightening those who walk in darkness, and who are so much the more endeared to us by how much they want our assistance." Quoted with approval to the B.A.A. by Thomas Pettigrew. (*B.A.A.J.* Vol.VI (1850) p.174) Brougham was involved in both the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the movement to set up Mechanic's Institutes for the education of the working class; neither of which was adopted with great enthusiasm by those for whom it was intended!

<sup>27</sup> See Wilton & Bignamini (1996).

<sup>28</sup> For instance, the young Lord Burlington was so impressed by his tour in 1707, that he became instrumental in introducing classical architecture into Britain. See Wilton-Ely (1973)

<sup>29</sup> The Italian portrait painter Batoni made a living portraying the English Milordi against a backdrop of well-known Roman sites. For instance, Thomas Dundas, later 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Dundas (1764) is shown posed in front of the familiar sculptures of the Apollo Belvedere and the Laocoon.

<sup>30</sup> The Discobolus had been excavated in Hadrian's Villa in 1791. It was added to the finished portrait after Townley had bought the statue in 1798. The cannibal had been excavated in the Baths of Trajan in the seventeenth century. Townley bought it from the Barberini collection in 1768.



and Baron d'Hancarville, who had been responsible for compiling a catalogue of the Hamilton Greek vase collection. The impression is carefully created to show Townley as a man of wealth and taste, whose seriousness as a collector is demonstrated by his employment of the well known d'Hancarville to catalogue his collection.<sup>31</sup>

Townley can be described as an antiquarian connoisseur who collected beautiful objects from the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome. He was very knowledgeable and his library contained a large collection of books and drawings concerning the arts of the ancient world. The Zoffany portrait demonstrates the accepted notions of how such objects should be displayed whether in private houses or public museums. The objects bear no systematic relationship to one another; rather they are used as props to create an overall impression. There was a decorative order and intent, but no desire to inform or educate the observer. Instead there was an unspoken assumption that these forms had an intrinsic value and a timeless quality that made them as appropriate to the eighteenth century as they had been two thousand years before. It was probably also assumed that any observers would 'read' the decorations in the way that their owner intended, as visual clues that he belonged to a particular class, with all that that entailed. In Townley's collection the objects were divorced from the society and the context that gave them historical meaning, they were there to portray the owner as a man of education and good taste. In other words they were as much about the collector as they were about the collected.

### Old Views Challenged: Subject Matter

This use of the classical past and its antiquities as a means whereby the dominant position of the ruling elite was proclaimed and maintained began to be challenged during the early- and mid-Victorian period. It was just one aspect of a more general questioning of established values and authorities that began during the later eighteenth century and involved a more imaginative and emotional response to many aspects of life including the past. One aspect of this response in Britain

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<sup>31</sup> It was in the same spirit that a speaker at the B.A.A. conference told his audience that, "There could be more divine pleasure on earth to the man of genius and cultivated understanding than to hear the dramas of Sophocles recited by the side of the Apollo or the Laocoon." (B.A.A.J. Vol.IV (1848) Presidential address to the Worcester Annual Meeting).



became known as the Celtic Revival and involved a reappraisal of the importance of the archaic, non-Roman British past and an appreciation of the imaginative appeal of the wilder and more picturesque parts of Britain in which they had lived.<sup>32</sup> Two series of poems were particularly influential in spreading these new 'romantic' ideas. In 1760 the Scot, James Macpherson published Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands that he claimed were the translations of ancient Celtic folk stories written by a bard, Ossian. Although their provenance was questioned from the beginning, they continued to be very popular.<sup>33</sup> The second series was Reliques of Ancient Poetry (1765) by Thomas Percy. What this 'alternative' story of the past offered was a non- classical framework within which the past and its relevance to current changes could be understood. In so far as the ruling elite's claims to authority had been based in part on their association with an inheritance of the classical past, so the alternative history could be seen as a potential threat to their continuance in that role.

Myths and legends also offered a different way of perceiving and understanding the past. Instead of favouring texts written by members of an elite, the ballads were rooted in the traditions and oral myths shared by whole communities. They had allegedly always existed, but their status as acceptable historical evidence was now being debated and acknowledged, due in no small part to the work of Sir Walter Scott. He had been familiar with the ballads of the Scottish borders since childhood and greatly admired Percy's poetry. He published his own version in The Border Minstrelsy in 1802. Scott's was an emotional and idealised response to the past.<sup>34</sup> By basing the action of his novels in a specific historical period and using a wealth of accurate detail to ensure that they should appear 'true to their time', Scott

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<sup>32</sup> This shift in taste was influenced by Edmund Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Idea of the Sublime (1759) that questioned the ordered classical manner of looking at the physical world. It also coincided with a disruption of the tourist trade to the Continent during the Napoleonic period. See Malcolm Andrews (1989). Amongst well-known visitors to the Scottish Highlands and Islands who were inspired by the experience were Johnson and Boswell in 1777 (James Boswell, *The Journal of the Tour of the Hebrides*, 1785) and Felix Mendelssohn in 1829. (*Hebrides Overture*).

<sup>33</sup> Gibbon wrote, "Something of a doubtful mist hangs over these Highland legends." (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1776. Abridged version, Pelican, 1960) p.65. The truth or otherwise of the Ossian ballads were still being debated in 1856 when an article on The Ossianic controversy appeared in the A.J. Vol. XIV (1856) p.25. Napoleon is reputed to have carried 'Ossian' on his campaigns and to have said that they were to him what Homer had been to Alexander.

<sup>34</sup> See A. Chandler (1971) and S. Bann (1984) Chapter 5.

blurred the boundary between fact and fiction, history and myth.<sup>35</sup> He demonstrated the same sleight of hand in building his house at Abbotsford: it was constructed using parts of old buildings to create the impression of genuine age. His historical novels were immensely popular both in Britain and on the Continent. The French historian, Augustin Thierry, called Scott “that great historic master of historic divination” and contrasted “his wonderful comprehension of the past with the petty erudition of the most celebrated historians.”<sup>36</sup>

Another important development was the study of comparative philology, which provided intellectual force to what Momigliano has described as “the desire to penetrate below the Roman surface of Western Europe.”<sup>37</sup> Using the newly developed skills of philology, German scholars such as Wolfe argued that Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey were composed of a series of ancient oral tales collected together and only written down over hundreds of years. Niebuhr used these arguments to support his view that Livy’s account of early Rome was also based on oral tradition.<sup>38</sup> Niebuhr’s theories probably owed some of their appeal to the fact that they seemed to support, and therefore justified, the new interest in epic and ballad. The British historian, Edward Freeman, described Niebuhr’s work as “acting like a spell... The tale which our fathers had believed on the authority of Livy sank to the level of a myth, the invention of a poet, the exaggeration of a family panegyrist.”<sup>39</sup> Thomas Arnold was so impressed that he wrote his History of Rome (1838-1843) to ensure that Niebuhr’s “discoveries and remarkable wisdom might best be known to English readers.”<sup>40</sup> Macaulay’s response to these new ideas was to reverse the process by which legends had been transformed into history by

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<sup>35</sup> Among the secondary sources for Ivanhoe was Joseph Strutt whose books were based on his research in the manuscripts in the British Museum and Sharon Turner’s History of the Anglo Saxons (1799-1805). He also used a range of primary sources that had been re-printed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Chaucer and Froissart.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Asa Briggs (1966) p.10.

<sup>37</sup> Momigliano (1976) p.257.

<sup>38</sup> In Germany scholars such as Jacob Grimm, used similar arguments to justify studying early folk tales in a search for a German past free of Roman influence. See Marchand (1996) pp.154-173.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Freeman review of Mommsen’s “History of Rome” in the National Review, April 1859. Cited in W.R.W. Stephens (1895) p.202.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Arnold (1<sup>st</sup>, ed. 1838-1843). 5<sup>th</sup>, ed. (1848) p.vii.



recreating some of the stories in Livy back into poetry in Lays of Ancient Rome (1842).<sup>41</sup>

Although Niebuhr was influential among leading scholars, I have found no overt references to his work by the antiquarians in my studies. Therefore it must be supposed that they experienced his ideas at second hand through Scott's novels and Arnold's histories.<sup>42</sup> Certainly by the middle of the century the idea that there were several kinds of historical evidence was becoming more acceptable. The archaeologist Charles Newton argued that "every peasantry has its songs and mythic legends, its rude oral narrative of real events, blended with its superstitions. Archaeology rescues these from oblivion by making them a part of printed literature. It is thus that Walter Scott has collected the minstrelsy of the Scottish border and Grimm the traditions of Germany."<sup>43</sup> The antiquarian Thomas Wright described the process through which this could happen. "A vast mass of popular fables, much of it of a mythical character and romances, floated during the middle ages from country to country and from mouth to mouth and these frequently taking a colouring from place and circumstance become located, and being fixed upon individuals, were handed down to us as historical facts."<sup>44</sup>

The expanded view of acceptable historical evidence meant that the classical past could be seen in a rather different light. Whereas in the past it had been seen as almost a-historical, and more relevant to contemporary Britain than the intervening years, the history of Roman Britain could now be studied as just one period among many others in a continuing national history. The new way of looking at the past set the historians free to study the Romans with the new skills of archaeology and philology. It also allowed them to evaluate the contribution of other periods and groups to the British past: a factor that would become increasingly important in debates about English identity later in the century.

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<sup>41</sup> In the preface to The Lays of Ancient Rome (1842) Macaulay gives a resume of the debate concerning the mythical basis of Livy and refers to Scott as "the great restorer of our ballad-poetry." (p.23) For Scott's influence on Thomas Arnold and Macaulay see H. Trevor-Roper (1969) Edwards (1999) pp.70-88

<sup>42</sup> The extent of his influence can be gathered from such references as this from Smith's Dictionary of Antiquities. (1843) "The history and political relations of the nations of antiquity have been placed in an entirely different light since the publication of Niebuhr's Roman History." (p.vii)

<sup>43</sup> A.J. Vol.VIII (1851) p.3.

<sup>44</sup> J.B.A.A. Vol.IV (1948) p.298.



I have concentrated on the nature of historical evidence and changes in the way the past was perceived, as these are clearly of central importance to a study of the reception and influence of historical studies on contemporary culture. However, other intellectual developments had also begun to question some of the basic ideas underpinning the nature of the world and the place of man within that world. German scholars were looking at the evidence for the authenticity of the biblical accounts. Translations of their work were published in Britain from the 1820s on and provoked both a furious reaction and considerable anxiety. Two books, Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-1833) and the anonymous Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,<sup>45</sup> (1844) had used the structure of rocks and fossil evidence in such a way as to throw doubt on the biblical accounts of creation. Their implied rejection of these accounts and the suggestion that the timescales involved in geology were infinitely longer than had traditionally been supposed, called into question the very foundations of belief.<sup>46</sup> Charles Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) appeared to provide evidence that species transmuted as a result of natural selection and not as a result of a pre-ordained plan of the Almighty. Darwin was careful to avoid the implications of his findings for human origins, but evidence of very early human remains discovered by Boucher de Perthes in Abbeville seemed to suggest that his ideas applied to man as well as animals.<sup>47</sup> The new ideas meant that antiquarians would have to re-think their chronology of pre-historical human development and find alternative techniques for doing so. The implications were challenging, particularly for those who looked to the past for reassurance and evidence of continuity.

The classical texts appeared to offer an established framework of knowledge upon which antiquarians, who were interested in the Romano-British past, could rely.

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<sup>45</sup> The author was the Edinburgh publisher, Robert Chambers. See Secord (2000) Secord estimates that by 1860, 23,750 copies had been published in ten editions, a large sale for non-fiction at the time. (p.3)

<sup>46</sup> Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) was a wealthy lawyer turned geologist. His book was hugely influential. It disputed the cataclysmic origins of the earth and suggested that it had developed as the result of slow changes that were still operating. Darwin took Lyell's first volume on his travels on the Beagle and influenced his ideas on evolution. If Lyell were correct, 4004 B.C.E. the date traditionally accepted as the date of creation would have to be rejected.

<sup>47</sup> The results of the French excavations were reported in 1859 to the Society of Antiquaries by John Evans. Darwin discussed human evolution in The Descent of Man (1871)



But the classical accounts contained only sparse references to Britain and their reliability as historical evidence was being questioned by some scholars.

### Sources of Knowledge

Although there were a large number of Roman texts most of them had little to say about Roman Britain. First of those that did is Caesar's account of his British campaigns in The Gallic Wars which includes a description of the native population a hundred years before the conquest. But as the antiquarian Thomas Wright pointed out, such was the lack of information that "most of the descriptions found in subsequent writers are little more than a repetition of the scanty information given by Caesar who was himself only acquainted with the south eastern part of the island."<sup>48</sup>. In addition there is a general account of the Claudian conquest and expansion after the 43 C.E. invasion in Tacitus' Histories and The Agricola. Dio Cassius also describes the invasion and gives a detailed account of the Boudican revolt in 60 C.E. Dio and Herodian give accounts of the campaigns of Septimius Severus in Caledonia and the North in the third century C.E. But apart from these, references to Britain are scattered and always incidental to the main content, the history of Rome itself. Britain is seen through Roman eyes and the accounts are written to serve the purposes of Romans at the heart of the Empire.<sup>49</sup>

Evidence of a different sort was provided in surviving military and administrative papers, such as the Antonine Itinerary, a third century military road book, and the Notitia Dignitatum, a list of the chief military and civil dignitaries compiled in C.E. 408. In his book, The Roman Wall (1851), the clergyman John Collinwood Bruce demonstrated the way such sources were used. "When inscribed stones are found, bearing the name of a cohort mentioned in the Notitia, the inference is natural that, in most cases at least, the Imperial Notitia will furnish us with a key to the ancient designation of the station. The argument becomes irresistible, when, in several successive instances, the designations thus obtained correspond exactly with the order of the places as given in the Notitia."<sup>50</sup> By using the Notitia,

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Wright (1852) p.43

<sup>49</sup> For instance, Braund describes Caesar's account of his campaigns as a "polemical work of self justification as Caesar was seeking a place in Roman history." Braund (1996) p.6.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce The Roman Wall (1851) p.61. Bruce was the main populariser of the Roman remains along the wall.

antiquarians were able to deduce that the Second Augustans had been withdrawn from the fortress at Caerleon before 408 and were stationed on the Saxon Shore in Kent. It was from such fragmentary and scattered references that the antiquarians attempted to build up a picture of Roman Britain.

Often the only real evidence was to be found in the remains of buildings and in particular, the inscriptions they contained. Bruce based his whole account of Hadrian's Wall on such evidence: "The plan adopted has been to make the Romans tell their own story. Scarcely a single statement is brought forward which is not directly deduced from inscriptions found upon the wall."<sup>51</sup> But the inscriptions were frequently misleading and occasioned lively debates, as happened in Chester over the exact interpretation to put on a Greek inscription found in Roman remains.<sup>52</sup> Such controversies led Charles Roach Smith to remark that "in the absence of written history, they furnish acceptable, if not copious and connected information."<sup>53</sup> More evidence was to be gathered from the legionary marks. It was the practice for the Roman legions to imprint their symbolic marks on any building work they undertook and using them it was possible to trace the movements of the various legions. The Twentieth Legion had been based in Colchester prior to the 61 C.E. revolt, but tiles inscribed with their name had been found along Hadrian's Wall and these had been used as evidence that the legion was posted for some time in the second century on the northern frontier.<sup>54</sup>

Another source of information was the accounts written after the departure of the legions in the fifth century. The first of these, widely quoted by the Victorian antiquarians was *De Excidio* written by the British monk Gildas in the middle of the sixth century. He describes the final years of Roman rule, but stresses that he had no access to a general history of Roman Britain because no such thing existed and therefore he had to rely on oral evidence. Bede relied heavily on Gildas when he wrote his account a century later.<sup>55</sup> Both Gildas and Bede were used as sources

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p.v.

<sup>52</sup> *J.A.A.H.S.C.* Vol. I (1857) p.200.

<sup>53</sup> *B.A.A.J.* Vol. IV p.262. Roach Smith was the leading antiquarian of mid-Victorian Britain.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce (1850) p.247.

<sup>55</sup> For Gildas see Thompson, *Britannia*, Vol. X (1979) pp.203-215. For more general Celtic sources for the Roman period see Dumville *History*, Vol. 62, (1977) pp.173-190.



of information by medieval chroniclers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth and Richard of Cirencester. Eighteenth century antiquarians had regarded the medieval chronicles as reliable, however by the middle of the nineteenth century their reliability was beginning to be questioned on the basis of internal evidence of forgery.<sup>56</sup>

How much local antiquarians knew, or wanted to know, about these new ideas is not clear. The books and journals contain references that suggest some scepticism about the nature of the evidence, particularly non-Roman evidence. For instance, in 1801 William Coxe referred to Geoffrey's History of Britain as a 'romance', and in 1846, Thomas Wright thought that "the account of Bede can hardly be looked upon as better than a fable."<sup>57</sup> But others were less willing to relinquish the familiar and long trusted-texts. The Kent antiquarian, Beale Poste, defended Richard, "whose work has been considered by some of our first historians and antiquaries so highly important to illustrate the early history of Britain."<sup>58</sup> Beale Poste was also involved in a dispute with the historian Thomas Wakeman concerning the authenticity or otherwise of the Chronicle of Tysilio, used as evidence by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Both authors agreed that Geoffrey had used the chronicle's text, but whereas Poste believed the original to be genuine, Wakeman believed it was a 'sheer pretence' on Geoffrey's part and "could have been written at any subsequent time between 940 and the present."<sup>59</sup> There is little evidence of the same scepticism regarding the Roman histories. It is possible that the post Roman accounts were seen as less reliable than the classical texts because,

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<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain (1135) claimed to be a Latin translation of an early English text. In Kendrick's opinion it was "The most significant book in the history of British antiquities." (Kendrick (1950) p.7) Richard of Cirencester's account appeared in 1747, apparently discovered by Charles Bertram. Although no original document was ever produced, Bertram persuaded the antiquarian William Stukeley that it was genuine and Stukeley championed it in Britain. But in 1838 the English History Society chose to reject it from amongst the received materials of English history. (A.J. Vol. III (1846) p.161) Woodward, the librarian at Windsor Castle, finally exposed it as an eighteenth century forgery. (Gentleman's Magazine, new series, Vol. I p.301) See S. Piggott (1985) p.126-138. Although discredited, the information in both Geoffrey and Richard continued to influence popular accounts of Roman Britain; it can be detected in Our Island Story, the standard children's history published in 1905.

<sup>57</sup> Coxe (1801) p.243 and B.A.A.J. Vol. II (1846) p.50.

<sup>58</sup> Gentleman's Magazine Vol. XXVII (1847) p.377. Poste suggested that Richard's account could have been based on a text by Tacitus in a Constantinople library and subsequently lost.

<sup>59</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. X (1854) p.367. Poste did concede that Geoffrey had introduced, "many romancing narratives and a whole book of prophesies...in short he supplies a specimen of a twelfth-century editor." (Ibid. p.231)



notwithstanding Niebuhr's work, many antiquarians still believed the Roman texts to be contemporary accounts and therefore more reliable. But it is also possible that challenging the familiar classical texts required a greater leap of faith than many antiquarians were willing to take. Whatever learned scholars had to say about the origins and early history of Rome, to men who had spent years studying these works and who were accustomed to regarding them as examples of the high point of civilisation such questioning must often have appeared as heretical. If the reliability of the texts was challenged, the antiquarians had to use other methods to discover Roman Britain.

### *Old Views Challenged: Method*

In 1850 the soldier and antiquarian Richard Westmacott described the virtuosi of the past as "accumulating scraps of antiquity, without selection, order or application... dilettantism without definite object... a better class in short, of curiosity shops." But changes in contemporary archaeology meant that, it "may almost lay claim to be a science."<sup>60</sup> It is clear that Westmacott saw his activities as significantly different from those of Townley and his fellow virtuosi. They were different partly because, unlike the connoisseurs who collected beautiful objects from foreign civilisations, nineteenth-century antiquarians were interested in the British past. Therefore they were forced to deal in the available evidence of that past which, apart from the scanty textual references, was almost entirely composed of mundane artefacts and material remains.

In the seventeenth century natural scientists had carried out their work primarily through observation.<sup>61</sup> But by the nineteenth century antiquarians realised that facts alone were not enough, that in order to gain understanding it was necessary to create a classification system that would suggest working hypotheses. As the historian John Kemble explained, "it is necessary to collect in a very different manner and to look for answers to questions which hitherto no one had thought of putting... Comparison and combination, these were the two layers by which the

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<sup>60</sup> *A.J.* Vol. VII, p.1-7. The article was signed R.W. (Jun). His father was Richard Westmacott who had been responsible for arranging the old fashioned displays in the British Museum.

<sup>61</sup> See S. Piggott (1989) pp.7 & 24.

inert mass of facts was to be moved.”<sup>62</sup> The relative ignorance of pre-historic and non-literate societies is evident in John Akerman’s Archaeological Index (1848). He acknowledged that “Celtic, Roman and Anglo Saxon objects are confounded with each other in a manner calculated to embarrass and perplex the archaeological student.”<sup>63</sup> But contemporary knowledge of the pre-historic societies was so limited that he grouped together all pre-Roman artefacts as ‘Celtic’.

The search for more detailed observations and better empirical evidence took two forms, neither of them new. First there were the attempts to categorise historical objects as in the work of Winckelmann, the French antiquarian Caylus and the nineteenth century Danish archaeologists. Second were the detailed topographical accounts of local historians, whose methods were based on those of William Camden, the sixteenth-century antiquary.

### Classification Systems

Winckelmann (1717-1768) was the librarian to Cardinal Albani in Rome. He realised that many of the best statues were in fact Roman copies of Greek originals. His History of Ancient Art (1764) depicted the art of ancient Greece as developing and changing through a series of styles, which were related to specific historical periods. His methods consisted of a very close examination of many individual pieces, which were then used to draw conclusions about the society in which they had been produced. It was this method of working that was unique for the time. His identification of one style of Greek art in the fifth century B.C.E. as the Sublime was to have a profound effect on later archaeologists and historians. He argued that the art produced during this sublime period represented the highest possible aesthetic development and that all art produced since was, by definition, inferior. Winckelmann had developed both a new technique for historical dating and a theory of art history which, by suggesting an inevitable decline from an ultimate high point, was based on a value judgement that would continue to be

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<sup>62</sup> A.J. Vol. XII (1855) p.297. Kemble was the leading Saxon scholar of the time, his book The Saxons in England was published in 1849. He had also been responsible for the publication of about fifteen hundred Saxon documents in the Codex Diplomaticus (1839-1848).

<sup>63</sup> John Y. Akerman (1847) Preface. Akerman (1806-1873) had founded the Numismatic Journal in 1836 and became secretary of the London Society of Antiquaries in 1853.



influential in the defining of aesthetic taste. It would also continue to influence the arrangements of collections and museums well into the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

Winckelmann's methods involved comparison to achieve classification, but only of certain objects deemed to be works of art. In contrast the Comte de Caylus (1692-1765) formed a collection of all sorts of objects, of all ages and from many countries that he described and illustrated in great detail. The results were published in seven volumes Recueil d'Antiquities Egyptiennes, Etrusques, Grecques, Romaines et Gauloises (1752-1768). Caylus declared that he was not a collector: "My taste for the arts has not led me to any desire for possession... Antiquities are there for the extension of knowledge. They explain the various usages, they shed light upon the obscure or little known makers."<sup>65</sup> He believed that the knowledge acquired through a careful examination of objects would enable the antiquarian to establish categories through which conclusions about the different groups or cultures of origin could be drawn. Although in many ways Winckelmann and Caylus used similar methods, Caylus made no value judgements and included all artefacts however menial. There were no 'supreme' points, merely an attempt to follow the changes as they developed. His insistence that material evidence was as useful to the scholar as the written word released antiquarians from their potentially restricting reliance on the classical texts. This was to be particularly important for the interpretation of the remains of pre-historic man.

Since the eighteenth century a succession of Danish archaeologists had unearthed a rich reserve of early artefacts that had been preserved in peat bogs. But without any written records, such as existed in those parts of Europe that had been a part of the Roman Empire, the Danish scholars had difficulties in explaining their discoveries. A Danish Professor explained the problem. "Everything which has come to us from heathendom is wrapped in a thick fog; it belongs to a space of time which we cannot measure. We know that it is older than Christendom, but whether by a couple of years or a couple of centuries or even by more than a millennium, we can do no more than guess."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Potts (1994).

<sup>65</sup> Caylus, 1753. Cited in Schnapp, (1993) p.240.

<sup>66</sup> Ramus Nyerup (1806). Cited in Daniel (1967).



In 1816 Christian Thomsen, the curator of the national museum in Copenhagen, developed a classification system based on the material from which the artefacts were made, which he claimed represented a chronological sequence of development. It became known as the Three Ages of Antiquities, namely, stone, bronze and iron, and was based on a minute observation of many artefacts and the detection of fine differences. Thomsen arranged the collections according to his scheme and in 1836 produced a guidebook to the displays.<sup>67</sup> Thomsen's assistant and successor as curator was Jens Worsaae, who wrote what came to be regarded as the first modern book on archaeology. He claimed that "as soon as it was once pointed out that the whole of these antiquities could by no means be referred to one and the same period, people began to see more clearly the differences between them."<sup>68</sup> Again it is possible to see similarities between the methods of the Danish archaeologists and those of Caylus and Winckelmann. They all used close observations to distinguish a range of categories into which artefacts could be divided. The difference between them lay in the Danes' exclusive reliance on objects rather than texts and Winckelmann's concentration on selected artefacts.

### Topographical Accounts

The other method used by nineteenth century antiquarians was to gather together and describe all that was known about a specific locality. The precedent had been set by William Camden (1551-1623), whose Britannia, published in 1586 in Latin, provided the first detailed account of the antiquities of Britain. The 1695 edition, written in English and edited by Edmund Gibson, became the standard text to which all future writers referred. Britannia was followed by a steady flow of publications, some national and other regional, that exemplify the close association which was seen to exist between the remnants of antiquity and features of the natural world such as fossils and plants. For instance, Edward Lhwyd who was responsible for the Welsh chapters of Gibson's edition of Britannia, was primarily regarded as an expert on fossils and the botanist Richard Plott, apparently saw no

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<sup>67</sup> C. Thomsen, 1836. English translation by Lord Ellesmere, A Guide to Northern Antiquities (1848) The translation was widely reviewed in the British archaeological press.

<sup>68</sup> Worsaae (1843). English translation William T. Thoms, The Primeval Antiquities of Denmark, (1849) Cited in Daniel (1991) p.97. Some British antiquarians were unconvinced. Thomas Wright criticised the system in Wright (1852) pp.vi-viii and Kemble was also opposed. One effect of the three-age system was to place the existence of early man further back than had been imagined and before any written accounts were available.



incongruity in including descriptions and illustrations of antiquities in his Natural History of Staffordshire (1686). Both Lhwyd and Plott were curators of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and members of the Royal Society, the foremost scientific body of the time.<sup>69</sup>

In the eighteenth century, William Stukeley was another scientist with antiquarian interests. The Victorian antiquarians used his Itinerarium Curiosum (1724) as a guide to the monuments and remains still standing in the previous century. Detailed maps of the whole country produced by the newly created Ordnance Survey were also a useful source of information. The Director General of the new body, William Roy wrote The Military Antiquities of the Romans in North Britain (1773), widely consulted by Victorian antiquarians.<sup>70</sup> These books were followed by a large number of local surveys, in which smaller areas were described in meticulous detail.<sup>71</sup> The men who compiled these surveys were ‘the true godfathers’<sup>72</sup> of the Victorian antiquarians who formed the backbone of the local archaeological societies in the nineteenth century. It was this tradition that informed the work of the local societies in my study.

The way in which one Victorian archaeologist used these surveys as a starting point for his own investigations is to be seen in the work of Richard Neville in Great Chesterford. He used Stukeley’s map of the site, “though I believe Dr. Stukeley, who wrote in 1719, is no longer considered an authority to be depended upon.” But he felt able to use the map because “I have verified it for myself.”<sup>73</sup> The temple marked on Stukeley’s map as Temple Umbra, Neville took to be the vestige of a fort described by another antiquarian, John Horsley in Britannia Romana (1732). Horsley believed that the fort had been built by the Romans and

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<sup>69</sup> This was an association that continued well into the nineteenth century, as the names of some of the newly formed archaeological societies indicate: Shropshire and North Wales Natural History and Antiquarian Society (1835); Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (1849); Suffolk Institute of Natural History and Archaeology (1848) and Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (1853) to name but a few.

<sup>70</sup> Hingley (2000) pp.39-40

<sup>71</sup> For instance, Morant (1748); Cox (1801) Ormerod (1816); Colt Hoare (1810-1822)

<sup>72</sup> The terms “godfather” was used by Richard Neville to describe his relationship with the antiquarian Gage Rockwood. He used the phrase in *Sepulchral Exposita* (1848).

<sup>73</sup> Neville (1847) p.10. Presumably Neville considered Stukeley’s evidence to be unreliable because of his obsession with the Druids later in his career. See Piggott (1985).

then occupied by the Saxons. When Neville excavated the “ghost of a temple, I hoped to raise up a substantial body from the ruins and present it as the fort or building indicated by Horsley.”<sup>74</sup> He found many artefacts including “a fine shallow red patera, intended doubtless to catch the blood of victims slain on the altar.” It was a conclusion that was based on a reference in the Aeneid to, “Aeneas applying them in this manner while engaged with a priestess in offering sacrifice.”<sup>75</sup>

Neville’s work at Great Chesterford is a good example of the way in which Victorian antiquarians used a variety of sources including topographical accounts and classical texts. He relied on Stukeley’s map, originally drawn to trace the fifth route in the Roman Antonine Itinerary, to which he added his own finds. But although he appears to have been content to use older antiquarian references concerning the location and importance of the site, he turned to the classical texts to inform the results of his own excavation. He also used his imagination: “I have amused myself with re-peopling the town and country with their former occupants. In an instant the walls rise from their ruins; once more are they thronged by the garrison, who parade the streets, resounding with the martial hum of Roman legions.”<sup>76</sup> When Roach Smith visited the site in 1848, he clearly felt that the finds did not justify Neville’s vivid description. “Nothing was discovered that could possibly determine the original destination of the edifice, and we are only justified in styling it a temple, because from its somewhat isolated position and the absence of all domestic features, it would appear to have been devoted to some public purpose.”<sup>77</sup> When Roach Smith considered the internal layout of the building, he felt it was misleading to use Virgil’s description because, “they apply generally to a high class of buildings, something remarkable even in Italy.”

Neville personifies the difficulty of attempting to categorise antiquarians as either virtuosi or archaeologists. He was a wealthy, leisured member of the upper class

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.39.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.39.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid p.48. Roach Smith quoted this passage in his Vol. II (1886) pp.49-50. He commented that, “the expressions ‘the garrison’ and ‘Roman legions’ are fanciful as applied to Roman Chesterford which was never a prominent military station.”

<sup>77</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.367.



who owned a landed estate at Audley End, Essex, which he described proprietarily as, “my own hunting ground.”<sup>78</sup> His museum was composed of an eclectic mixture that in some ways resembled ‘a curiosity shop’.<sup>79</sup> He was also a serious collector of, among other things, jewellery. However there was another side to his activities that distanced him from the virtuosi. Neville was a serious, careful excavator who related the artefacts to the features of the landscape and made his results available through a series of articles and books. In *Sepulchra Exposita* (1848) he declared that, “The great object of all antiquarian research is the accumulation of a number of authenticated occurrences which by corroborating one another when collected and compared, establish data by which may be determined certain historical facts.”<sup>80</sup> He emphasised the need to “note at the time the nature of whatever relics may be discovered, their relative positions and most particularly their condition... accuracy in all these minutiae cannot be too strictly enforced and many little circumstances which appear trifling and comparatively useless, will be found afterwards most valuable in the mass of evidence.”<sup>81</sup> So although he appeared to fit the virtuoso role socially, by inclination and method Neville chose to align himself with the new breed of scientific archaeologists. His involvement with the archaeological societies that were such a feature of the Victorian scene is evidence of this dual nature.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Archaeological Societies*

Industrial development and urbanisation had led to a boom in building activity throughout the country. New housing, sewage systems and above all the development of the railway network had meant excavating on an unprecedented

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<sup>78</sup> Neville (1848) p.32.

<sup>79</sup> Apart from antiquities, it also contained a collection of stuffed birds. An 1845 watercolour of the museum shows the museum cases in a room with a “highly domestic decorative scheme, complete with wallpaper, carpet and curtains, making the overall impression one of pleasing idiosyncrasy.” *Audley End*, English Heritage, 1997, p.21

<sup>80</sup> Neville (1848) p.30

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.31. The excavating techniques of some leading antiquarians were frequently slipshod. For instance in 1842 Albert Conyngham’s and John Akerman’s excavations were criticised as, “rather recklessly conducted, and but insufficient notes were taken of the relics in situ. *B.A.A.J.* Vol. XII (1856) p.103. Albert Conyngham was the first president of the British Archaeological Association.

<sup>82</sup> Neville was the second president of the Essex Society and a vice-chairman of the Archaeological Institute. He played an important part in the A.I. campaign to change the laws concerning Treasure Trove in the 1850s.



scale. As a result foundations of ancient buildings and huge numbers of artefacts were unearthed, many of them Roman. But just as the wealth and variety of the Romano-British heritage was being revealed, it was immediately put at risk as building contractors used the remains of Roman buildings as a source of stone. One particularly notorious example was the fate of the Roman theatre in St Albans (Roman Verulamium), where lack of funds and pressure from developers meant that a promising site was covered over.<sup>83</sup> Roman city walls, such as in York, Colchester and Chester, were especially vulnerable as expanding populations led to the need for more land for housing. Artefacts were either destroyed or sold to dealers and collectors and their connection with the site lost. All this was not new: Roman remains had always been used as a cheap supply of dressed stone and many 'cabinets of curiosities' contained objects found by chance. What had changed was the scale of the destruction and the anger among some interested individuals that more was not being done to preserve the relics of the nation's past.<sup>84</sup>

An analysis of the dangers posed to antiquities appeared in Archaeologia Cambrensis in 1846. The writer deplored the British Government's failure to aid preservation of national monuments and hoped that the day would come when, "The needless and wanton destruction or mutilation of any ancient monument shall be considered as a public offence." He cited the French Government as an example of good practice and was particularly impressed by French action in buying the Celtic monument at Carnac to prevent the local people using it as a quarry. He identified four types of destroyers. First were "needy or tasteless owners of property." Second were "government and municipal corporations", whom he characterised as "pitiless and ruthless monsters." Third were public companies, whether railroads, canals or any other similar works." Finally: "the beautifiers, the repairers and the restorers... who have done their full proportion of mischief to the

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<sup>83</sup> The St Albans Architectural and Archaeological Society was founded in 1845 to study local churches, but switched its interest to the Roman remains when R. Grove Lowe found Roman remains. The excavations were reported in the I.L.N. (29<sup>th</sup> January, 1848). The theatre was thought to be the only example in Britain and therefore its loss evoked a stronger reaction than most.

<sup>84</sup> For instance the government's destruction of nearly twenty miles of Hadrian's Wall to construct the road between Newcastle and Carlisle was described as a "sweeping and monstrous act of vandalism". Roach Smith (1852) p.179.



land.” Of all of these, he saw the companies as the “most selfish and most impudently clamorous.”<sup>85</sup>

Chief among those pressing for change was Charles Roach Smith (1807-1890) {Plate II, p.255}. Unable to go to university he had trained as a chemist. He had also developed an interest in Roman coins that eventually included all things Roman. From his shop in the city of London he kept a vigilant eye on new developments and campaigned to persuade the London Corporation to take a more pro-active role and set up a museum to safeguard salvaged artefacts. {Plate III, p.255}. The destruction was made worse, he argued, by the lack of a co-ordinated response by antiquarians and by the ignorance of the workmen. By visiting the building sites regularly and offering to pay the labourers for finds, he had amassed a large collection that he called his London Museum of Antiquities.<sup>86</sup> He became the leading figure in attempts to persuade government to protect ancient remains and travelled the length and breadth of the country, recording new discoveries and forming an informal network of connections through which the antiquarian community could be kept informed. He published the results of his enquiries in six volumes of Collectanae Antiqua (1848-1868) that remain an invaluable guide to contemporary Victorian archaeology.<sup>87</sup>

The concern raised by the destruction and the unwillingness of the London Society of Antiquaries to act more positively played a large part in the decision to set up an alternative national organisation.<sup>88</sup> The British Archaeological Society (B.A.A.) was founded in 1843 to encourage “intelligent researches into British antiquities and vigilant care for their preservation.”<sup>89</sup> Roach Smith was among the founding members, along with his friend, Thomas Wright, and with Albert Way the director of the London Antiquaries. Way (1805-1874) came from a wealthy family and was educated at Cambridge. He was a member of the London Society of Antiquaries

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<sup>85</sup> A.C. Vol. I (1846) pp.3-10. The author was Longueville Jones, one of the editors.

<sup>86</sup> The London Corporation took him to court, accused of receiving stolen goods. He won his case but the Corporation continued to harass him and refused to renew the lease on his shop.

<sup>87</sup> For more on Roach Smith see Rhodes (1993).

<sup>88</sup> The London Society of Antiquaries was founded in 1717 and William Stukeley was an early secretary. By the middle of the nineteenth century it was a moribund organisation, with a dwindling membership, poorly attended meetings and its journal Archaeologia in debt. See Evans (1956).

<sup>89</sup> A.J. Vol. I (1844) p.1.



and was its Director from 1842-1846. The London Society of Antiquaries' historian, Joan Evans, described him as, "an admirable example of the leisured archaeologist, the leaned amateur of the old school."<sup>90</sup> By contrast, Wright was from a poor background. A wealthy family friend paid for his education at Cambridge, where John Kemble aroused his interest in the Anglo Saxons. Over the next forty years he attempted to earn his living through writing. He produced a huge number of books and combined his literary activities with helping to organise various printing clubs, such as the Camden Society and the Percy Society.<sup>91</sup>

It was Way who outlined the purpose of the new body, starting with an explanation for the London Society of Antiquaries' lack of action. "Although of a national and distinguished character... The charter of the society makes no allusion to the preservation of the national monuments by influence or direct interference, when menaced by destruction."<sup>92</sup> He described how the new body would operate. There would be a central co-ordinating committee and a network of county members who would be able to keep an eye on potential damage to ancient remains. "The committee's purpose, as far as may be possible, [is] to secure the careful observation and record of such discoveries, and preservation of the objects found." Where this was not possible, the committee would favour the preparation of "a proper description, with plans and drawings."<sup>93</sup> The Archaeological Journal would be the means whereby members would be kept informed of developments and would act as a conduit through which new ideas could be discussed. Wright became the first editor. The new body encouraged the development of a network of local societies and by 1870 there were at least forty such bodies in England and Wales, most of them affiliated to the national association.<sup>94</sup> The speed with which new societies were set up indicate the level of interest in the past generally and in particular the recognition of the need to protect the remains. Common to both national and local bodies was a belief that the best way to ensure the preservation

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<sup>90</sup> D. Wtherall in Blaise Vyner (1994) p.10.

<sup>91</sup> The Camden Society (1838) printed and distributed historical documents and the Percy Society (1840) specialised in early English ballads and popular literature.

<sup>92</sup> A.J. Vol. I (1844) p.2.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p.5.

<sup>94</sup> For a complete list see Appendix IV in Philippa Levine (1986)

of artefacts was by the creation of museums, and as a result many local museums were created during the period.<sup>95</sup>

Despite these common aims, it was not long before differences between the antiquarians in the B.A.A. began to emerge. One contested issue was the feasibility of holding a national conference to which all members were invited and, as a result, only half the leaders took part in the first meeting in Canterbury 1844.<sup>96</sup> When those who had stayed away voted not to carry a report of the meeting in the Archaeological Journal, Wright published an account in his own journal, The Archaeological Album.<sup>97</sup> Amid accusations of ‘conflict of interest’ and ‘packing of meetings’ the subsequent row brought to the surface differences of opinion concerning the nature of the B.A.A. and views became polarised between the ‘Wright’ and the ‘Way’ factions, as they became known in the Press. The row could not be settled, and culminated in a split in 1845. Those who favoured the more traditional approach broke away, taking with them the Archaeological Journal, and formed the Archaeological Institute (A.I.). The B.A.A. retained the rump of the membership including Roach Smith and Wright, and created a new publication, the British Archaeological Association Journal. Underlying these disagreements were significant social differences that I will return to in Chapter 8.

Despite their differences all the archaeological bodies recognised the need to preserve the evidence of the past. But the acrimony ensured that there was no common voice on a range of other, but related topics. For instance, how should the remains be protected and by whom, which in turn raised the issue of to whom did they actually belong? Should the finds from excavations be kept in their locality or should they be brought together in some central repository? And most fundamental of all, was there a national interest and if so what part should the government play? Many of these issues were highlighted in debates concerning the contents and layout of the collection in the British Museum.

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<sup>95</sup> For instance Caerleon (1850), Colchester (1856), Chester (1857). In Cirencester where there was no formal society, a museum was built in 1856 to house the Dyer Street mosaics.

<sup>96</sup> Peripatetic conferences were one way of involving country members, as the success of the B.A.A.S. conferences since 1831 had indicated. See Morrell & Thackray (1981)

<sup>97</sup> D. Wetherall in Blaise Vyner (1994) p.14.



## The British Museum

The museum had been founded in 1753 to display private collections that had been donated to the nation. The contents were divided into three departments, manuscripts, printed books and natural history. Over the next 50 years the museum acquired several important collections of antiquities including: Sir William Hamilton's collection of Greek vases in 1772; the Alexandrian Egyptian antiquities acquired from the French in 1801; and the Townley marbles bought after his death in 1805. As a result of these acquisitions a separate department of antiquities was set up in 1807 and was rapidly enlarged by the Phigaleian Marbles in 1815, the Elgin Marbles in 1816 and the Richard Payne Knight collection of antiquities in 1824. More space was urgently required and in 1823 plans were approved for a neo-classical building designed by Robert Smirke (1781-1867).

By the time it was completed in 1847 the design of the building was considered out of date and old fashioned,<sup>98</sup> but in spite of the criticisms, the neo-classical style perfectly reflected the contents of the new department of antiquities. The collection consisted of aesthetically beautiful examples of art from the classical civilisations of Greece and Rome, arranged by the sculptor Richard Westmacott (1775-1856). Trained in the traditional academic manner, as described by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his lectures to the British Academy in the previous century, Westmacott arranged the antiquities for aesthetic affect and according to subject matter. The galleries were so arranged that the visitor walked through a mixture of styles and periods to reach the climax, the Elgin Marbles. The display was a graphic illustration of Winckelmann's belief in the supremacy of the sublime style. Some idea of the way in which the classical artefacts dominated the collections is to be gathered from a handbook to the antiquities produced in 1851. After stating that he only intended to deal with the most important features of the collections, the author said, "Best to begin with the Greek as that directly tending to form and elevate public taste." He continued, "The only collections omitted are those by the names of British and Anglo Roman Antiquities, being as yet too insufficiently arranged to admit of

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<sup>98</sup> By comparison with the fashionable Gothic style that had been used by Pugin and Barry for the new Houses of Parliament. The building was described as 'copyist', 'cold' and 'dead'. See Summerson in Chapel & Gere (1985).



classification and description.”<sup>99</sup> The statement indicates the two most important features of the collection, it was representative of great works of art and was unconcerned with British antiquities.<sup>100</sup> In fact official attitudes towards the need for a national collection of British Antiquities had not changed substantially from those expressed by Horace Walpole fifty years earlier. “The Roman remains in Britain are upon a foot with what ideas we should get of Inigo Jones, if somebody was to publish views of huts that our soldiers run up in Senegal or Goree... I have no curiosity to know how awkward and clumsy men have been in the dawn of arts.”<sup>101</sup>

However, changing attitudes that had led to the creation of the new archaeological bodies also led to demands for changes in the museum’s policy. One demand was that the collections should be representative of all aspects of human development rather than just examples of great art. If comparisons were to be made as advocated by the devotees of the more ‘scientific’ archaeology, then the collections would have to include as many examples as possible of the most mundane artefacts, however crude. As Edward Hawkins, keeper of Antiquities in the museum, argued, “A collector may accumulate a number of amusing and elegant specimens, but it is only by combination, concentration, and comparison, that an entertaining collection can be converted into an instructive museum, and Archaeology into a science.”<sup>102</sup> Another demand was that the national collection should have a separate display devoted entirely to British remains. Complaints that there was no provision for British artefacts had increased as interest in British archaeology had grown. Frequent disparaging comparisons were made between the generous displays in several Continental countries and the lack of such provision in the British Museum. For instance, Roach Smith, in 1849, commented that, “While Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, Brussels, Vienna, Petersburg, Munich, Rome, Naples, Athens and other cities and towns possess rich museums of national antiquities, founded and supported by public money, the U.K., with its boundless resources,

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<sup>99</sup> Vaux (1851) preface. Vaux (1818-1885) was an assistant in the department of antiquities. He was keeper of the department of coins and medals from 1861-1870.

<sup>100</sup> Jenkins (1992) pp.9-19 and pp.56-74.

<sup>101</sup> Cited in Evans (1956) p.155

<sup>102</sup> A.J. Vol.VIII (1851) p.44. Edward Hawkins (1780-1867) was a numismatist and the keeper of Antiquities from 1826-60. He was an active member of the Archaeological Institute.



reluctantly grants for the preservation of its ancient monuments, such inadequate doles, that foreigners ask in vain to see our museums of national antiquities, so little does any collection we yet possess answer expectations formed from an acquaintance with their own rich and well digested museums.”<sup>103</sup>

In 1837 the Duke of Northumberland offered a collection of Romano British artefacts to the Museum on condition that a separate room would be set aside for their display. But it was not until 1850 that Hawkins was able to report that a “British Room exclusively appropriated to the formation of a series of national antiquities had been provided.”<sup>104</sup> There was still considerable opposition both from outside and within the Museum. As late as 1860, Panizzi, the Principal Librarian and Director, reported, “the trustees have spent eight thousand pounds on medieval antiquities... and that is the reason that the classical ones are not progressing as they might... the trustees bought ivories, very fine in their way; but if you buy medieval ivories you do not buy Greek statues.”<sup>105</sup> The museum trustees continued to finance large-scale excavations overseas. Typical was Layard’s work at Nineveh between 1851-1860 in which the Assyrian antiquities were excavated and taken back to London, amid wide newspaper interest. The Halicarnassian and Cnidian marbles were discovered and excavated by Charles Newton, a former museum employee who became Hawkins’ successor as keeper of Antiquities in 1860. Significantly these acquisitions still conformed to a tradition that favoured large and spectacular objects of display; objects that were impressive more for their visual impact than because they formed some part of a coherent series.

Against such competition, the artefacts that were being unearthed by British antiquaries seemed mundane and ordinary and Panizzi’s objections illustrate the considerable opposition that still existed to spending public money on British artefacts. The arguments in favour of their inclusion were based on the assumption

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<sup>103</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.V (1849) p.380. There was a competitive edge between these major national museums. In the Napoleonic period art treasures from across Europe had been taken to the Louvre in Paris and during the surge in nationalistic feeling in Germany after 1815 two major museums, both classical in style and containing significant displays of ancient Greek sculpture, had been constructed; the Altes Museum in Berlin (Schinkel) and the Munich Glyptothek (Von Klenze).

<sup>104</sup> A.J. Vol.VII (1850) p.296. Augustus Franks, another active member of the A.I. was appointed curator.

<sup>105</sup> Report from the select Committee on the British Museum (London, 1860) paras.336-337. Cited in Caygill & Cherry (1997) p.38.



that a better understanding of the different periods in the British past was only possible if a systematic collection of all types of artefacts were available for study. In 1854 there was a storm of criticism from the archaeological societies when the museum trustees refused to buy the collection of Anglo Saxon antiquities excavated by an eighteenth century antiquarian, Rev. Bryan Faussett. The collection was unique because Faussett's meticulous excavation notes meant that the finds were fully documented.<sup>106</sup> Roach Smith had rediscovered the collection and, as a result of his interest, Faussett's grandson offered to sell it to the British Museum. The archaeological societies united in an effort to persuade the trustees to buy, and another antiquary, William Wylie, even offered his collection of Anglo Saxon artefacts to the museum free if they would agree to buy Faussett's collection. There was a fear that if they failed to do so it would probably be exported to France. The antiquarians' anger was summed up by the Archaeological Journal. After referring to "the disgrace that England alone amongst European states possesses no series of national antiquities", the writer concluded, "in the administrative body of that institution (the museum) the arbitrary narrow-minded spirit of the infesta noverca has been shown towards archaeological science."<sup>107</sup> In the event Joseph Mayer, a wealthy Liverpool businessman bought the collection and placed it for public viewing in his museum. Mayer paid Roach Smith to edit Faussett's notes and they were published as Inventorium Sepulchrale in 1856. It was probably due to the outcry provoked by this decision that the trustees agreed to buy Roach Smith's London antiquities in 1856.

At issue behind these controversies was the extent to which the government should be involved in preserving the artefacts and monuments of the national past. In 1852 Edmund Oldfield told the Institute that, "In a great and civilised community, proud of its history and jealous of its rights, some provision for protecting the trophies of ancestral genius from the injuries of time and change seems no unreasonable

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<sup>106</sup> Hawkins told the Society of Antiquaries that, "It does not consist of rare, valuable or beautiful objects, picked up or purchased from dealers at various times and in various places, with little or no record or perhaps false records of the discovery; but it consists of all the objects found in all the graves of a particular area." (Cited in Evans, 1956, p.274) The statement unintentionally throws light on the probable condition of many contemporary private collections.

<sup>107</sup> A.J. Vol.XI (1854) p.94



demand for archaeology to make on the state.”<sup>108</sup> But this was a controversial view, and particularly unpopular with the upper class who regarded private property rights as sacrosanct. The president of the Institute, Lord Talbot described the limited areas within which “government interference could properly take a part”. One was the encouragement of both national and local museums, another was the publication of ancient documents and finally that the government should act to protect ancient monuments.<sup>109</sup> The amount of time allocated to debating the issues surrounding ‘Treasure Trove’ at meetings during the 1850s is indicative of the difficulties involved in balancing the twin claims of safeguarding ancient artefacts on the one hand and private property rights on the other. The notion of public interest was still in its infancy and the claims of private ownership were generally given priority. As late as 1883 an article on the preservation of antiquities was still arguing that, “the key to most of our modern destruction is in the theory, a man may do what he likes with his own, and that the protection of antiquities interferes with the rights of property.”<sup>110</sup>

Predictably, Roach Smith blamed the Government for the inertia. “When our Government shall be composed of statesmen instead of placemen; of men who look to the credit, the prosperity, and the glory of our country, more than to the maintenance of themselves in power, and their connexions (sic) in places and in pensions, then and then only may it be expected that our national antiquities will be cared for and protected.”<sup>111</sup> This was Roach Smith at his most combative; but he was not alone. Similar comparisons between the French and British governments had been made by other antiquarians. Indeed, Wright had even suggested that it was the lack of action by the British government that led to the formation of so many archaeological associations. But what all these complaints failed to take into account were the different political agendas in the two countries. In France there had been a long period of political upheaval, culminating most recently in the

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<sup>108</sup> A.J. Vol.IX (1852) p.364. Oldfield was an assistant in the department of antiquities from 1848.

<sup>109</sup> A.J. Vol. IX (1852) pp.364-365. The government had passed legislation to establish a Public Records office in 1838. The Historical Manuscripts Commission was appointed in 1869 to investigate records in private hands and was regarded by some as ‘arbitrary interference’. (See Levine (1986) pp.119-122). The first Public Monuments Act was passed in 1882 without statutory powers.

<sup>110</sup> The Antiquary Vol.VII (1883) p.106.

<sup>111</sup> Roach Smith (1856) p.vi.



dismissal of an elected government by Napoleon III. He had good reasons for his attempts to reinforce the legitimacy of his shaky regime by appeals to a great national past, rendering the protection of the remains an imperative. In Britain, increasing industry and affluence strengthened the confident belief that private enterprise and *laissez faire* methods could be relied on as guardians of the nation's historical heritage.

One problem for the antiquaries in their quest for government support was that those individuals who were best placed to effect a change in policy, such as the museum trustees and government ministers, were frequently men whose ideas of historical taste and beauty were largely untouched by the new ideas. As a result, they were unsympathetic to the demands for change. Collections of comparatively crude artefacts, such as Faussett's, challenged some of the basic notions of beauty and taste by which ancient objects had been judged in the past. By questioning the priority previously accorded to the classical treasures of Greece and Rome, such collections appeared to undermine the values that such artefacts seemed to represent.

Roach Smith was aware of the mixed feelings evoked by new ideas. "It need never be apprehended, that where, as in this country, refinement of taste and a sound system of education prevail, classical antiquities will ever be neglected or be in danger of being superseded. It would be as unreasonable to dread such a result as to fear a decadence of esteem for the noble literature of Greece and Rome."<sup>112</sup> For although the old values and approaches were being challenged, this did not mean that they were rejected. The power and appeal of the classical accounts and the beauty of the artefacts continued to exert a strong pull and lent colour and depth to the artefacts that had been uncovered. This can be seen in the way in which Roach Smith managed to combine new skills and a taste for controversy with a continuing regard for old values. No one did more to encourage the new institutions and the broader horizons necessary to further the knowledge of the past. But he still believed in "the immense superiority of the ancient fictile vessels over similar work in the middle ages, it is only necessary to place them in juxtaposition, when the latter will appear positively uncouth and barbarous. When good taste was

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.x.

revised in later times, nothing of consequence was achieved that was not in imitation of the classics.”<sup>113</sup> Though he embraced the new methodology, Smith was still fascinated by the classical world: a fascination that had started with a collection of Roman coins, visits to the Roman villa at Bignor and re-readings of Gibbon’s Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire when he was a boy in the 1820s.<sup>114</sup>

Roach Smith was able to combine his passionate interest and regard for the Roman past with an equally strong belief in the need for new methods and techniques with which to study it. But how representative was he of British antiquarians as a whole? For many of them there was an inherent contradiction, between, on the one hand, admiring an ancient civilisation and wishing to uphold and imitate the values it represented, and, on the other, being confident and adventurous enough to welcome and use innovative new ways of doing so. In fact, most British antiquarians had to find some way in which to balance these apparently contradictory points of view, as will become clear when I start to look in more detail at the events in four areas.

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<sup>113</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.363.

<sup>114</sup> Roach Smith (1888) pp.100-103.



## **CHAPTER 3: CAERLEON**

In 1845 Delineations of Roman Antiquities found at Caerleon was published in London. The author, Edward John Lee {Plate IV, p.256}, declared that: “The town of Caerleon in Monmouthshire has long been known as a Roman military station and as a place of great interest to the antiquarian.”<sup>1</sup> He described the Roman remains and emphasised their vulnerability. “Many of them are left exposed to the open air and are daily receiving injury from the weather... It is mortifying that by far the greater part are lost, scattered or destroyed.”<sup>2</sup> Lee’s book was to be the catalyst for all the archaeological activity that took place in the town over the next two decades, including the formation of an archaeological association, a museum and several excavations.

### **Roman Caerleon**

Although Lee had said that Caerleon was well known as a Roman military station, the Roman texts make no direct reference to the fortress of Isca Silures (the Roman name of the fort). Tacitus, Dio and Herodian had all described some events in the Roman occupation of Britain, but Isca Silures does not appear in any of these narrative accounts. The only textual information was to be found in the administrative and military records. It was known that Britain had been divided into two for administrative purposes and that one of these, Britannia Secunda, had a military base at Isca Silures, where the second Augustan Legion had been based. The third century military road book, the Antonine Itinerary, located Isca Silures in South Wales on the Via Julia between Bath and Carmarthen. Caerleon lay on the route of the Via Julia at a convenient bridging point on the river Usk and close enough to the sea to allow easy access for provisioning a large military settlement. It followed from this that if evidence of the presence of the second Augustan Legion could be located in the immediate area, then the location of the fort could be identified. An abundance of tiles with the Second Augustan’s name and mascot, the Capricorn, found at Caerleon suggested that the site was Isca Silures. Lee’s book contained drawings of the tiles and he said: “Fragments of tiles and bricks

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<sup>1</sup> Lee (1845) preface.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

showing the original form and also the various impresses found upon them, all of which indicate that they were the work of artificers belong to the Second Augustan Legion.”<sup>3</sup> The only real evidence of the fortress was to be found in the buildings and in the inscriptions they contained. For instance an inscription found in the churchyard in the centre of the town referred to the Emperor Severus and the possible rebuilding of the site at the end of the second century. Lee concluded, “The knowledge we possess of the history of Caerleon under the Romans is scanty indeed, in fact it rests more on the antiquities which are found there, than on actual historical records. There can however be no doubt that for a long series of years it was the residence of the Second Augustan Legion.”<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary antiquarians had to rely largely on other accounts, written between the departure of the legions in the early fifth century and their own time. Lee quoted from Bede’s account when he discussed the possible origins of the word Caerleon. However, the most useful sources for Caerleon’s past were History of the Kings of Britain (1135) by Geoffrey of Monmouth and Journey Through Wales (1188) by Giraldus Cambrensis. Both men were thought to have visited Caerleon and therefore were regarded as eye-witnesses. Geoffrey described the rise of a great British king, Arthur, who defeated the Saxons and created an empire. He continued: “Arthur, who was quite overjoyed by his great success, made up his mind to place the crown of the kingdom on his head... in the city of the legions. Situated as it is on the River Usk, not far from the Severn Sea and being richer in material wealth than other townships, it was eminently suitable for such a ceremony... It was adorned with royal palaces and by the gold painted gables of its roofs it was a match for Rome.”<sup>5</sup>

It was Geoffrey who was responsible for the widespread popular belief that Caerleon had been the site of King Arthur’s court. The supposed associations with Arthur were to be used by later writers, for instance, in the Celtic epic, The Mabinogion, which Lady Charlotte Guest translated in 1843, and in Tennyson’s

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lee (1845) p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth (Penguin ed. 1966) p.202.



epic poem, The Idyll of the Kings (1859).<sup>6</sup> The whole Arthur saga as described by Geoffrey suggested an alternative Celtic inheritance for the Caerleon site that could be seen as challenging the Roman history. (I return to these alternative versions of the past in a later chapter.)

The other mediaeval source had been written by the cleric, Giraldus, on a recruiting journey for the Third Crusade. Lee quotes Giraldus' description of the ruins, "This was an ancient and highly privileged city, admirably built in former times by the Romans with walls of burnt brick. You will see here many traces of ancient grandeur, immense palaces, whole roofs once gilded, imitated the Roman splendour, it having been built by the Roman emperor and adorned with handsome structures. Here was a prodigious high tower, noble baths, remains of temples and theatres with grand walls, parts of which are still remaining."<sup>7</sup> The similarity between the two passages written 50 years apart, would seem to suggest that Giraldus had read Geoffrey's account and that his views had been shaped, at least in part, by the earlier writer. Lee makes no comment as to whether he believes Giraldus, but the fact that he quotes him in full, and that it is the only quote he makes apart from the classical texts, would seem to suggest that he was content to let this description stand. It would certainly leave the general reader with the impression that this was how Lee wished to portray Roman Caerleon. His friend, the Monmouthshire antiquarian Thomas Wakeman, treated Giraldus' description with more scepticism. "When Giraldus, writing of its remains as existing in his time, mentions immense palaces ornamented with gilded roofs, we may be allowed to doubt whether any roof of Roman construction could possibly have endured through the seven centuries at least which had elapsed from the departure of the Romans to his time. Henry Huntingdon, who wrote half a century before Giraldus,

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<sup>6</sup> Mabinogion (1906) p.150 and Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1971) Tennyson is supposed to have written this while staying in Caerleon. Tennyson wrote to his wife: "The Usk murmurs by the windows and I sit here like King Arthur in Caerleon." (16<sup>th</sup> September, 1856 in Letters of Tennyson Vol.II 1851-1870 (Oxford, 1987) p.158).

<sup>7</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis (Penguin ed. 1978) p.114.

gives a very different account of it: he tells us that the walls were then scarcely to be seen.”<sup>8</sup>

There were also the observations of a series of travellers. The most influential of these was undoubtedly William Camden in Britannia (1586). The chapter on Welsh antiquities in the 1695 edition described Caerleon as, “The city of the legions, placed here by Julius Frontinus in garrison against the Silures.”<sup>9</sup> He described in some detail inscriptions, altars and statues, a pavement discovered in 1685, a stone coffin and pottery. All of these were illustrated. Camden quotes Giraldus and Geoffrey, but says of the latter’s account, “It seems not of entire credit, so many ridiculous fables of his own invention hath he inserted in that work.”

Finally there was A Historical Tour through Monmouthshire which was written by the Rev. William Coxe and his friend, Richard Colt Hoare in 1799. They had been among a number of visitors attracted to the wilder and more picturesque parts of Britain that had increased as a result of the increased interest in the Celtic past.<sup>10</sup> Colt Hoare was an antiquarian from Wiltshire. He had translated the 1586 edition of Camden from the original Latin and was therefore very familiar with the work on Caerleon. Coxe was quite sure that Caerleon was a Roman fortress. “There is no occasion to employ many words in proof of these facts; the remains of the walls and amphitheatre, the numerous sculptures, altars, pavements, inscriptions, coins and other antiquities discovered within the town and the vicinity, evidently prove it the site of a great Roman city. Immense quantities of Roman bricks stamped with *LEG II AUG*, testify that this was the situation of the Second Augustan legion.”<sup>11</sup> Coxe gave a detailed description of the remains with site plans and drawings. He remarked on the quantity of Roman bricks and tiles lying on the ground, but regretted that most of the Roman antiquities had been removed. The account was published in 1801 and was used by the antiquarians in the 1840s as a guide to what

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<sup>8</sup> A.C. Vol.III, (1849) p.228. Other visitors to the town, Mr and Mrs Hall were also sceptical about Geoffrey’s account. “It has long been regarded as a collection of fables, to which no value can be attached.” (Hall, 1859, p.118)

<sup>9</sup> Camden, Camden’s Wales (Being the Welsh chapter taken from Edmund Gibson’s revised and enlarged edition of 1695, Translated from the Latin with additions by Edward Lhuyd, 1722).

<sup>10</sup> See Smiles (1994) pp.46-75

<sup>11</sup> Coxe (1801) p.80



had stood on the site 50 years before and therefore highlighted what had been lost in the intervening years. The awareness of the extent of the loss was to be a crucial factor in Lee's determination to form an antiquarian association in Caerleon.

### Roman Caerleon in 1845

Lee's book gives a clear picture of the Roman remains in 1845. It is essentially a series of drawings, with an explanatory text attached. "The object of the following pages is not either to write a history of the place or to give a dissertation on Roman antiquities in general; but simply to afford such information as may be necessary for the illustration of the drawings."<sup>12</sup> It is apparent that there were virtually no standing remains and that the wealth of artefacts described by Coxe only 50 years before had all but vanished. He talks of the quarrying of ruined buildings, fragments of Roman pottery, of a hypocaust, "not preserved because it stood in the way of improvements", and of another, "turned into a garden tank."<sup>13</sup> However it was still possible to see the shape of the ancient fortress, "Partly by the remains of the actual walls and partly by an elevated ridge formed from their ruins."<sup>14</sup> The remains of the amphitheatre were still discernible, although local people called it 'King Arthur's Round Table'. Alongside the theatre remains was a field called the Bear-house field, which, according to Lee, "Probably derived its name from its having been the place appropriated to the animals destined for the sports of the theatre."<sup>15</sup> Lee reports that outside the walls considerable remains of burial urns had been unearthed, particularly along the old road between Caerleon and Caerwent, the ancient Venta Silurum. But again, these tombs had been "ransacked in a search for treasure" and "broken up to mend the roads."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lee (1845) p.vi

<sup>13</sup> Ibid pp.3-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.3

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p.4. An example of the way in which the antiquarians' explanations were informed by their expectations based on their knowledge of the classical texts. In 1926, Mortimer Wheeler persuaded the Daily Mail to finance his excavation of the amphitheatre. The paper's reports were coloured by similar expectations. "In the days of the Caesars gladiators fought and according to tradition, Christian martyrs were put to death as they were in the great Colosseum in Rome." (Cadw, Caerleon, Roman Fortress (1988) p.5) In fact modern archaeologists believe that the Caerleon amphitheatre was used for training troops and as a venue for military speeches only.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p.6

It is apparent that the remains were under threat from a number of directions: as a source of stone for building activity; because they posed an obstruction in the way of some proposed changes; or because of an assumed artistic or monetary value. Even superstition could be a problem, as the fate of one glass vessel illustrates. "It contained a large quantity of charcoal and burnt bones. After having exhibited it to one or two persons, it was thrown with its contents into the bed of the river, the labourer being unwilling, for some superstitious feeling, to keep human bones in his house."<sup>17</sup> Surviving artefacts were scattered about the locality in the private collections of individuals. In spite of all these difficulties, Lee's conclusion was quite positive, "Caerleon is a place of unusual interest to the antiquarian and where the ground has been materially raised by the ruins of one series of buildings over those of another, no excavation can be made without the chance of adding something to the present collection of Roman antiquities."<sup>18</sup>

The impression derived from Lee's description of the site and from a survey of the sources of information available at the time is that the Caerleon antiquarians were presented with a range of fragments, both material and textual. If they were to form any coherent picture of their town during the Roman period, they would have to find some way in which they could bring these fragments together in order to make sense of them. However, more immediately, they were confronted with the knowledge that even those fragments were being lost and this probably prompted Lee's determination to preserve what remained.

### *Social and Economic Caerleon*

Caerleon is on the River Usk, about four miles north of the estuary on the Severn and at a point at which the river is still tidal. It therefore offered easy access to the sea to enable the provisioning of a large body of men in the Roman fortress. Presumably the benefits offered by the site were still appreciated in the Mediaeval period as the various accounts, including those of Geoffrey and Giraldus, continue to emphasise the importance of the site after the Romans left. Apart from being the centre of Arthur's court, it was also claimed as the site of a bishopric and of a

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<sup>17</sup> Lee (1845) p.22

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.7



college of astronomy. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book and it is certain that the Normans built a castle there. However by the time Coxe visited the town in 1799 its significance had changed. "The town of Caerleon is reduced from its ancient extent and grandeur, to an inconsiderable place. Since the removal of the port to Newport, it is no longer the centre of trade and communication and was scarcely visited by travellers."<sup>19</sup>

A small fishing port in 1801, Newport had become the hub of an extensive transport system, bringing coal and metal products to the port for export. The population of just over one thousand in 1801 reported by Coxe had risen to 19,323 by 1851 (census figure), fed by an influx of migrants from the countryside. By contrast, Caerleon's population rose only slowly from the 763 reported by Coxe in 1801 to 1,539 recorded in the 1851 census. The relative decline of Caerleon is highlighted by travellers' accounts contrasting its poverty in the mid nineteenth century with its glorious past. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Hall who visited in 1855 ask, "Is this poor village, an assemblage of ragged houses and mouldering walls, is it indeed that great city where the legion named "invincible" lived?"<sup>20</sup>

An alternative, and perhaps more realistic description of the town in the nineteenth century is to be gathered from contemporary trade directories. For instance, Slater's Royal, National and Commercial Directory of 1858/59 reported that Caerleon was: "An ancient market town" which now consisted of, "two streets, indifferently paved and the houses, mostly old and irregularly built."<sup>21</sup> The directory lists the businesses in the town including wheelwrights, maltsters, bakers, butchers, tailors, and a regular provision and cattle market once a week. All of which creates a picture of a small market town supplying the rural area around with goods and services. The only other employment was in two tinplate works "in the vicinity". These had been started in the eighteenth century and had been flourishing, but like the town generally, they were being overtaken by developments elsewhere. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the two works

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<sup>19</sup> Coxe (1801) p.107

<sup>20</sup> Art Journal, April 1859, p.117. Another tourist made a similar comment. "How the mighty have fallen. Can this mean town scarcely rising above the rank of a village, be the place of which Giraldus speaks?" C. Cliffe (1848)

<sup>21</sup> Slater's Directory 1858-1859. Entry on Caerleon in Monmouthshire.

were declining and the local school logbook noted that, “families are leaving because of the lack of orders for the tinplate works.”<sup>22</sup> In addition to the working-class population of Caerleon, there were 63 men listed in the 1854 electoral roll as eligible to vote; rather more than the number listed as ‘ministers of religion and gentry’ by Slater’s Directory in 1858. Many of these people were also committee members of the archaeological society, founded in 1847. They include the two proprietors of the tinplate works, the Anglican Minister and Edward Lee.

### Caerleon Archaeological Association

On October 28th, 1847, a group of people calling themselves, “friends to the formation of a museum of antiquities at Caerleon” met in Lee’s house. They decided to set up the Caerleon Archaeological Association (C.A.A.). They had two objectives. First, “To build a museum to preserve the remains of the past which would otherwise be destroyed,” and second, “the furtherance of any antiquarian pursuit, whether by excavation or otherwise.”<sup>23</sup>

The meeting elected a chairman, secretary and six committee members. The Bishop of Llandaff had already agreed to be the patron. The chairman was Sir Digby Mackworth, the local squire and a retired professional soldier, in which capacity he had been a part of the military force used to put down rioting in Bristol in 1831. He was a devout Christian, a pillar of the local church and a teacher in the Sunday school. Two of the committee, David Jenkins and William Powell, were Anglican ministers, the former in Caerleon Church. Henry Hawkins and Illtyd Nichol were local landowners and farmers. John Butler and John Jenkins were the proprietors of the two local tinplate works. The secretary, Lee, was a director of a large nail works in Newport. Another prominent member was Octavius Morgan, who became the chairman in 1853 after Mackworth’s death. He was the local MP and the brother of the wealthy local landowner, Lord Tredegar. He also played a prominent role in the national antiquarian bodies. Other active

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<sup>22</sup> Hockey (1981).

<sup>23</sup> C.A.A. Minute Book 27<sup>th</sup>, October 1847. The minutes are hand written in a series of notebooks. They are unpublished and in the possession of the Monmouthshire Archaeological Association, the name adopted by the Caerleon group later in the century.



members were Thomas Wakeman, a landed gentleman, whose main interest was in mediaeval charters, and Francis Fox, a railway surveyor.

With the exception of Fox, these men were all wealthy property owners, well educated and with time to pursue activities outside their work. In this respect they were similar to the typical groups which Levine identified in her study, although it is probable that there were a greater number of industrialists than might have been expected in a typical English county group. It is apparent from the reports in the local newspaper, the Monmouthshire Merlin, that they had many interests in common. Their names appear again and again in the lists of those involved in groups and committees, whether to oversee the installation of new sewers in Caerleon or to pass judgement on their fellow citizens as JPs. These men were a part of the ruling elite in the area and this was emphasised by the roles they held in their local community.

The only individual who presents a more complicated picture is Edward Lee himself. In so far as he was a wealthy man with a reasonable amount of leisure, he was quite typical. But he differed from his fellow antiquarians in several significant ways. Lee came from a wealthy merchant family in Hull and had only moved to South Wales in 1841. He was therefore the only non-native in the group. More significantly, he was a dissenter and therefore denied access to the traditional centres of classical education in the universities. In spite of this he appears to have had a good knowledge of the Roman classics, as his writings are full of classical references. He had been an early and enthusiastic member of the local literary and philosophical society in Hull, where he had helped to set up its museum. It is probable that it was through his association with the 'Lit and Phil' that he met John Phillips, a founding figure of the British Association of Science and later, a professor of geology at Oxford. Under Phillips' influence Lee became fascinated by geology. Many years later he wrote, "It was a common thing in the larger towns of the North of England for well known scientific men to deliver courses on natural philosophy and science. In general they were attended, not only by young

learners, but by the older and wealthier classes, who at the time considered it essential to increase their store of knowledge.”<sup>24</sup>

Lee travelled widely, particularly in northern Europe. In Denmark he came into contact with the new archaeological ideas of Thomsen and Worsaae and their theories about the three-stage development of pre-history. He was fluent in French and German and translated several scientific books into English, including The Lake Dwellings of Switzerland (F. Keller 1866) which described the preservation of early remains in the mud of Swiss lakes. As a result, Lee was familiar with the new ideas that were to completely redraw the theories of pre-history later in the century. Crucially, his main interests lay in geology, the science that was at the forefront of new ideas concerning the age of the earth and how it had been formed. It is impossible to know to what extent Lee informed his fellow antiquarians in Caerleon about these new theories and, if he did so, how they were received. But it is clear from the minutes of the C.A.A. that it was his interest and energy that drove the group forward.

It is possible to follow the activities of the association through the minute books and the very detailed reports in the Monmouthshire Merlin. The AGMs were the only regular meetings and there appears to have been little formal attempt to educate the members in the way that Lee had experienced in Hull. From the beginning the main focus was on the creation of a museum in which to preserve the threatened antiquities. Any other activity, whether it was the writing of learned papers or arranging an excavation, was done on an individual basis. For instance, in 1848, a local farmer, John James, arranged for a tessellated pavement discovered on his land to be uncovered. It was subsequently donated to the museum. The following year, during the course of laying a new lawn in his garden, the committee member, John Jenkins, discovered the foundations of a Roman building that he paid to have uncovered.<sup>25</sup> It was not until 1855 that the society was able to fund its first official excavation. This was at the Caerwent site

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<sup>24</sup> Lee (1881) p.1.

<sup>25</sup> Lee (1850) He wrote, “It is much to be regretted that it [the remains] cannot be preserved entire, consistently with alterations which Mr. Jenkins is making.” (p.6)



and was carried out under the supervision of John Ackermann, the secretary of Society of Antiquaries in London.

From 1847 the AGM's followed a similar pattern. They were held in Caerleon. After the reports and the election of officers, a number of papers were read. These were written by members and were usually concerned with items of interest discovered during the previous year. The objects were laid out on a table for the members to examine. After the formalities, the meeting would visit a Roman site of interest in the town, which had been uncovered for that purpose by the landowner concerned.

The newspaper accounts of these meetings suggest they were very sociable affairs with as many as eighty people sitting down to the meal that always rounded off the proceedings. The dinner involved speeches and general congratulations all round. The sense of a small group in which everyone knew everyone else comes over clearly and, at first sight, reinforces Levine's picture of a socially cohesive elite. To what extent this view is justified will be discussed in Chapter 8. Nor is it easy to judge how much the wider membership was involved in any activities other than the formal dinner. At the 1860 AGM, Lee asked the members to take a more active part, remarking that, "to be useful, a society ought to include a number of working members."<sup>26</sup> This would seem to suggest that most of the work had fallen on just a few shoulders and that it was the officers and committee who wrote the papers and arranged for site activity.

Lee, Octavius Morgan and Wakeman took part in the wider antiquarian world and all three contributed articles to national archaeological journals.<sup>27</sup> Lee and Wakeman were the county representatives for the B.A.A. and Morgan was an active member of the Society of Antiquaries in London and acted as vice-chairman for a number of years. The national archaeological bodies were entertained and shown the sights in Caerleon in 1851 and 1855. Charles Roach Smith visited on several occasions and reported the findings in the B.A.A.J. Lee's books were reviewed and praised in all the national journals and he in turn subscribed to most

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<sup>26</sup> M.M. 25<sup>th</sup>, August 1860.

<sup>27</sup> A.J., B.A.A.J., A., A.C.

of the archaeological books published during this period. Finally Lee corresponded with many leading figures in the field, whom he lists in the front of his books. Apart from Roach Smith these included, Albert Way, the secretary of the A.I.; Professor Theodor Mommsen, the Roman historian and world authority on Latin inscriptions in Berlin, and Rev. C.W. King, a Cambridge don and authority on Roman coins. It was through this network of letters and reports that the work of the Caerleon archaeologists became familiar to a wider British audience.

In the beginning the over-riding concern of the group had been the preservation of the Roman remains and the construction of a museum. However, once that objective had been achieved the exclusive concentration on matters Roman ceased and members' varied interests became more apparent. Octavius Morgan and Thomas Wakeman were concerned with the mediaeval history of the area and Lee was more interested in its pre-history. These topics probably reflected the interests of the wider archaeological world as a whole, where, on the one hand, there was an enormous interest in all things Gothic, while on the other, the discoveries in Abbeville, in France, excited an interest in the newly realised ancient history of humankind. After 1855, the annual meetings were no longer held exclusively in Caerleon or always visited local Roman sites. For the next few years the meetings were held at a variety of castles.<sup>28</sup> In 1860 the annual meeting took part in an excavation at a Bronze Age barrow and Lee read a paper on the flint implements found on the site.

However, the only major excavation undertaken by the society was at a Roman site, Venta Silures (Caerwent), five miles away. This was believed to have been the main site of the Silurian tribe which had been taken over and used as the administrative centre by the Romans. Roach Smith visited the village of Caerwent in 1847 and observed that there was still considerable evidence of Roman walls and masonry but that three tessellated pavements which had been reported to the Society of Antiquaries in the previous century had all disappeared. His report concluded, "The entire place offers a tempting field for a systematic investigation; it may, indeed, be considered almost as unbroken ground, for the discoveries of tessellated pavements, shafts and capitals of pillars, with other remains of

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, Usk in 1856, Raglan in 1857 and White in 1859.



buildings, such as are upon record, appear to have been the result of accident, and were never followed up by any regular researches.”<sup>29</sup> It was probably as a result of such enthusiastic reports that it was decided to excavate the site in 1855.

The dig was carried out under the direction of John Akerman, secretary to the Society of Antiquaries in London, although Octavius Morgan wrote all the reports. The remains of many buildings, including what appeared to be a bathhouse, were uncovered but the picture they revealed was confusing. “The arrangement of all the Romano British villas and houses which I have seen is, I must confess, to me very unintelligible and seems to bear no relation to the plans of Roman villas in Italy.”<sup>30</sup> Morgan was using his knowledge of the remains in Italy to guide him in deciphering the problems presented by the Caerwent site. He cited Pompeii and the classical texts to construct a model of what should be on the site and concluded, “All these apartments I think our baths exhibit, arranged in the most compact manner.”<sup>31</sup> After a detailed plan and a model had been constructed for display in the museum, directions were given for the site to be filled in carefully, “so as not to injure or destroy what is curious and thus to preserve its existence for the gratification and information of future antiquaries.”<sup>32</sup>

### A Museum For Caerleon

Lee had been prompted to write his book, Delineations of Roman Antiquities, to draw attention to the fact that the material Roman remains of the town were being lost and destroyed. Once the level of destruction had been described the provision of a building had become the primary objective for the newly formed society in 1847. The 1845 Museums Act enabled local authorities to raise a halfpenny rate

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<sup>29</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.IV (1848) p.255.

<sup>30</sup> Morgan (1856) p.16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p.16.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid p.28. Originally this excavation was to be carried out by the B.A.A. whose members had visited the site in 1854. These plans had fallen through because of letters written by the Association's secretary, Thomas Hugo to Octavius Morgan and Rev. Lewis, the owner of the Caerwent site. At an Extraordinary General Meeting of the B.A.A. in December 1854, Hugo was removed from office because he had allegedly made “unfounded accusations against the treasurer (Thomas Pettigrew), and by subsequently writing letters, which were calculated to injure the interests of the Association.” (B.A.A.J. Vol.X (1854) p.380) I have not been able to trace these letters, but other letters appear to show that Hugo was trying to remove Pettigrew from office and that there was considerable antagonism between the two men. (British Library, Add MSS 30296 1850-1856) I would suspect that this incident was probably not dissimilar to the original B.A.A. and A.I. split ten years before.



for the creation of museums to instruct and amuse the public and Lee had hoped that there might have been some funding from this source, but he was to be disappointed. Financing the building was to be a continuing anxiety.<sup>33</sup>

The museum site in the centre of Caerleon, next to the church, was on land donated by the chairman, Mackworth. In view of their concern to save the remains, it is perhaps rather surprising that the committee do not appear to have questioned whether their choice of site might actually be obscuring some of the remains they were seeking to protect. It is clear from their written papers that the committee was aware that the site stood almost exactly over the point at which the two main roads through the fortress would have crossed and, therefore, that this would have been the site of several important legionary buildings. But I have not seen any suggestion that excavation was considered prior to the start of the building work.<sup>34</sup>

The committee decided that they wanted a building in the Doric style with, “dimensions to be twenty foot by forty foot and sixteen foot high inside. It was to be lighted from above by a roof light, the floor to be raised three foot above the road, with four pillars in front and five pilasters on each side.”<sup>35</sup> The building was to include the use of four columns of freestone which, according to Coxe, had probably belonged to some Roman structure {Plate V, p.256}. The choice of the Doric style was in keeping with the Greek revival, which had been fashionable earlier in the century and was still considered appropriate for museums of classical art and artefacts.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the reasons for the choice of style, the minutes merely

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<sup>33</sup> Most other societies made use of a few rooms in an already existing building, for instance in Colchester and Chester. A brand new, purpose built museum was usually only provided where there was a wealthy patron to foot the bill as in Cirencester.

<sup>34</sup> Rev. Jones delivered a paper in which he related the site of the Roman fortress to the configuration of the contemporary town. “If we look at these roads pointing inwards, we shall find they all meet in the open square by the church, which stands as nearly as possible in the intersection of the lines drawn diagonally from the angles of the camp. Here was the forum.” (*M.M.* 14<sup>th</sup>, July 1849) Therefore the museum was built directly on the top of the site that Jones had correctly identified as important.

<sup>35</sup> Bowen (1971) p.3. Bowen’s notes say that he got this information from the Society’s minute book. I did not see such an entry when I read the minutes, although the actual building did accord with this description. Bowen’s source is therefore unclear. However, the minutes are brief and I was left with the impression that the main discussions and decisions were not made at the formal committee meetings.

<sup>36</sup> William Wilkins had been responsible for the Greek Revival style of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society museum, which Lee would have been familiar with because of his close friendship with the museum’s curator John Phillips.



record that the Doric was chosen and that an architect friend of Lee's from Hull had agreed to prepare the designs without charge. What is clear is that the building was expected to be 'handsome' and 'an ornament to the town.' The Monmouthshire Merlin described it as being erected, "with such classical taste to serve as a museum."<sup>37</sup> Evidently the style was seen as important in conveying the seriousness of the endeavour.

From the beginning there were all kinds of problems. First, not all the members appear to have understood the need for a museum or why its contents should be restricted purely to the archaeological remains. Lee had to explain why the committee was collecting both subscriptions and donations. "Questions have been asked as to the intended appropriation of both, which would seem to argue that our circulars have not been as widely circulated, or at least so generally read as we had imagined. Our first object is to establish a museum solely for antiquities. However desirable it might be to have a general philosophical museum within the neighbourhood, this does not fall within our province."<sup>38</sup> He went on to explain that once the museum was built, the committee would be willing to undertake further excavations, but that in the meantime the building work was a priority.

The building work itself was also presenting difficulties. The original builder was found to have cut corners and some of the work had to be redone. But the main problem was a lack of money. At every AGM there were appeals to the members to contribute more funds and advertisements were placed in all the local papers asking for contributions. The 1850 Archaeological Journal carried a review of Lee's latest book, Description of a Roman Building and other discoveries lately found at Caerleon. The article ended with the observation that all these remains were to be housed in, "the museum actually in the course of construction... but the contributions have not proved wholly adequate to the completion."<sup>39</sup> There was a footnote explaining that Lee had written the book to raise funds and that any

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<sup>37</sup> M.M. 28<sup>th</sup>, July 1849.

<sup>38</sup> M.M. 14<sup>th</sup>, July 1849. "If only the building was once finished and the antiquities displayed, there would be an end for ever to the perpetual questions; what is it intended for? And what is there that can be put in it? If those who asked these questions, and there are many that do, want to devote an hour or two to an examination of all our treasures; the wonder would probably be not that Caerleon is now building a museum, but that so long a time has elapsed before a museum has been built."

<sup>39</sup> A.J. Vol. VII (1850) p.99.

contributions would be acknowledged. There is no record as to the response to this appeal.

Despite these problems, Lee was able to report to the 1850 AGM that the lower floor was already being used to house the heavier sculptures. The smaller items however needed to be displayed in glass cabinets, for which, as yet, they did not have the finances. After the meeting, the whole company went to inspect the new building, which had been decorated with flowers and where a large number of antiquities were temporarily displayed on tables with explanatory tickets. According to the *Merlin*: “The room is decidedly handsome and is well adapted for the purposes of a museum.”<sup>40</sup>

The building was finally opened to the public on August 2, 1850. In view of the publicity given to all the previous events, such as the annual meetings and fund raising events, it was a surprisingly low-key occasion. At a committee meeting later in the month it was decided that there should be a prominently placed box for donations and a visitors’ book. It would appear from this that there was no entrance charge, although this was to change later in the century. The same committee meeting also decided to appoint a keeper at a fee of not more than three guineas a year. The minutes do not record when this appointment took place, but the membership list of the society in 1863 lists a keeper, Mr. Powell, living at the post office in Caerleon (presumably his main source of income).

There are only rare reports of what was inside the museum in the early years. One was in the *Merlin* in 1851. “The upper or main floor is devoted to a display of tessellated pavements and several decorated tombstones and a variety of other articles of the ponderous kind; while the more minute portions in glass cases, attract very particular attention for being articles in common use in the private house or the workshop of the artisan, such as were handled in the days when the Romans held sway in Britain.”<sup>41</sup> Later visitors to the museum described it as a dark, narrow room with the walls covered in stone inscriptions. The displays were

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<sup>40</sup> *M.M.* 20<sup>th</sup>, July 1850.

<sup>41</sup> *M.M.* 8<sup>th</sup>, August 1851.



in high, black painted cabinets and consisted largely of coins and other small objects.

The best guide to the original collections is Lee's illustrated catalogue; Isca Silurum published in 1862. It is reasonable to suppose that the approach and layout of the guide reflects that of the museum itself. The contents are entirely archaeological, despite the offer of at least one collection of 'curiosities' turned down by the committee in 1851.<sup>42</sup> In the main the objects were Roman and from Caerleon. Those that were not, were grouped together as either 'Mediaeval' (ranging from glazed tiles and impressions of an early seal to a badge of Charles I) or 'Celtic' (including the contents of a barrow excavated in 1860 and some fragments of stone crosses). The Roman contents were classed under the headings of Stone, Earthen, Vegetable, Animal and Metallic materials. There was a separate section for the coins. Lee says that he had decided to follow the classification used by Mr. Wilde in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. "This arrangement seems admirably adapted to objects of one period, though not at all proper to be carried out in a general catalogue comprising objects of various ages." His descriptions are brief and refer to the objects in isolation, rather than to any possible context in which they might have been used. As Lee says: "the drawings speak for themselves."<sup>43</sup>

The decision to build the museum in the Greek revival style and its prominent site in the middle of the town suggest the importance and significance of antiquarian activities within the local community. The Roman remains were evidence of the town's prestige and importance in the past and it was hoped it could be restored and literally 're-built' as a result of preserving the remains. The museum building was an imposing reminder of past greatness and symbolised the hopes of its

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<sup>42</sup> C.A.A. minutes, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1851.

<sup>43</sup> Lee (1862) p.xi

founders that “this building would be the first step in restoring the town to its  
ancient importance.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The hopes are the chairman’s (Mackworth) at the stone-laying ceremony for the new building. (M.M. 24<sup>th</sup>, June, 1848)



## **CHAPTER 4: CIRENCESTER**

In the summer of 1849, workmen digging a trench for a sewer in the main street of Cirencester uncovered two large and intricately patterned mosaic pavements. The discoveries attracted a great deal of interest and the finds were reported nationally in The Times, the Gentlemen's Magazine and in the local paper, the Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard. The report in the Illustrated London News included a dramatic picture of a mosaic being raised out of the ground against the backdrop of the old town with its ancient church rising immediately behind the wooden lifting crane<sup>1</sup> {Plate VI, p.257}. The discoveries prompted renewed interest in the town's Roman past and a steady flow of visitors to visit the museum in which the mosaics were displayed.

### **Knowledge of Roman Cirencester Before 1849**

The Roman name, Corinium, had appeared in the third century military road book, the Antonine Itinerary, in which it was named as the meeting point of several major roads. It was also described as the capital of the province of the Dobunni (Corinium Dobunorum) in the eighth century Ravenna Cosmography.<sup>2</sup> It had therefore always been assumed that there had been a Roman centre somewhere in the vicinity. The fact that the contemporary town stood at the point at which the Fosse Way, Irmin Street and Acman Street met and the number of Roman remains discovered over the years, had led to a general assumption that the town of Cirencester was indeed the site of Roman Corinium. The nature of the settlement however remained uncertain, with some arguing that there had been a military presence in the form of a fort and others suggesting a purely administrative function. In the mediaeval period the town was mentioned in some of the early chronicles, but these accounts were often fanciful and very misleading. For instance, John Buckman wrote, "Richard of Monmouth concludes that Corium was built by a Roman general in the time of Claudius, probably by Plautius... and that it had walls and a castle in the time of Constantine and was strongly fortified." Apart from the lack of any evidence to substantiate these claims, it is unclear

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<sup>1</sup> I.L.N. 8<sup>th</sup>, September 1849.

<sup>2</sup> See Rivet (1970) p.34 and A. Vol.93 (1949) p.1.

whether Buckman is referring to Geoffrey of Monmouth or Richard of Cirencester. Both of had written chronicles about the early history of Britain, whose provenance was already being debated.<sup>3</sup>

More reliable reporters were the sixteenth century travellers, Leland and Camden, whose accounts of their visits to the town were frequently quoted. Leland observed that, “a man may yet, evidently perceyve the cumpace of foundation of towers sumtyme standing in the waul.”<sup>4</sup> A few years later in 1586, Camden wrote, “that this was a considerable place is evident from the Roman coins, chequered pavements, and inscriptions in marble dug up here”.<sup>5</sup> The first antiquarian account was by William Stukeley in Itinerarium Curiosum (1721), in which he said, “Here they dig up antiquities every day and in the plain fields, the tracks of foundations of houses and streets are evident enough. Here are found many mosaic pavements, rings, intaglios and coins in abundance and all bear testimony to the ancient grandeur of this place.”<sup>6</sup> Stukeley also reported a vault supported by pillars of Roman brick, which he thought were the remains of a temple. Sixty years later in 1780, when Samuel Rudder wrote History and Antiquities of Cirencester, he relied heavily on Stukeley’s account and he quoted whole passages from the Itinerarium. However he disagrees with Stukeley’s opinion that the town had been created by the Britons before the Roman invasion. In spite of the fact that neither Caesar nor Strabo mentions Corinium, Rudder uses them to justify his belief that the town was built early in the Roman occupation and became an important station for the Roman army. “These authorities will stand their ground against the fond conceits and loose conjectures of later writers.”<sup>7</sup> Rudder speculated on the origins of the oval earthworks on waste ground to the west of the town, just outside the supposed lines of the Roman walls which was known locally as the Bull Ring. “Probably a Roman theatre, but history is silent to the use of it. Mr. Camden mentions one something like it in Westmoreland called King Arthur’s Round Table, which he

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<sup>3</sup> Buckman was instrumental in raising the mosaics and will ‘loom large’ in this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Rudder (1780) p.6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p.12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.7.



thinks might possibly be a jousting place.”<sup>8</sup> Other writers had suggested that the mound was either a quarry or a burial ground.<sup>9</sup>

As Rudder had relied upon Stukeley, so Beecham relied on Rudder as a source of information for the history he wrote in 1842, History and Antiquities of the Town of Cirencester. Beecham’s account gives a picture of the town and the way in which its past was perceived just prior to the discoveries of 1849. He also makes use of Giraldus’ twelfth century description of Roman remains at Caerleon. “This description by Gerald of Wales, which so graphically sets forth the elegancies and the conveniences introduced by the Roman settlers, may serve as the model by which to imagine ancient Corinium, surrounded by the lofty walls, of great width and strength and the centre of different roads connecting it to remote parts of the country... It is no wonder that it became a favourite station for the troops and that much labour and expense was lavished to render it a fitting residence for the luxurious and wealthy colonialist. The remains must prove that the Anglo Roman city was at least one of the richest and best populated settlements in the island.”<sup>10</sup> This use of an earlier source is an example of the way in which local historians in the mid-nineteenth century created coherent images of the Roman past in their locality. The vividness of the account relies to a considerable extent on a twelfth century description of another Roman site, written many centuries after the Roman departure in the fifth century. Taken together with the luxurious nature of the remains and mosaics, such descriptions allowed Beecham to create a picture of Cirencester that confirmed his imaginative view of life in a Roman town. It was a picture that was not only based on the physical remains, but also on a range of pictorial and literary associations suggested by the words ‘Rome’ and ‘Roman’ in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The effect was heightened by the contrast provided by Beecham’s portrayal of the British settlement replaced by the Roman town. “Domestic architecture consisting of rude huts formed of stakes, wattled together

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.28.

<sup>9</sup> It is in fact the Roman amphitheatre and the inhabitants of the town have used it for centuries as a site for various entertainments.

<sup>10</sup> Beecham (1842) p.196. For Giraldus’ original description see chapter on Caerleon.

<sup>11</sup> I will return to these associations in Chapter 9.

and placed like the wigwams of American Indians amidst impervious forests and swamps.”<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to observe the way in which each new account of the town’s past builds upon and uses information contained within the earlier texts. Comments from past authors are introduced, presumably to add extra weight to the contemporary author’s views; but this is done with very little attempt to question the sources of the original.

This view of Cirencester as an important and wealthy centre was reinforced by the discovery of several beautifully decorated mosaic pavements in the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Their effect is to be seen in this observation by Thomas Wright. “Corinium, a town filled with magnificent houses and public buildings... Some of the richest and most elegant mosaic pavements in this island show its ancient splendour.”<sup>14</sup> Most of these had been found in the surrounding countryside and their discovery suggested that there had been a whole series of large and prosperous villas in the vicinity of the town. Between 1789 and 1817 Samuel Lysons had excavated villa sites at Woodchester, Withington and Great Witcombe and all had revealed mosaics reported in the Archaeologia.<sup>15</sup> A particularly fine pavement had been discovered on land belonging to the local magnate, Lord Bathurst. He had it removed and displayed in his garden for his visitors to admire. Other examples had been found in the centre of town, lying beneath shops and houses in the cellars. A reviewer in the Gentlemen’s Magazine thought that “the pavements of Cirencester are much the same as Rome itself.”<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-1840s the antiquarians were convinced of the town’s Roman past. Although there were no standing remains, the outline of the old city could still be made out from the shape of the contemporary town. The mosaic on Lord

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 7 National Identity for the influence of travellers’ descriptions of native people on British antiquarians.

<sup>13</sup> Buckman & Newmarch (1850) pp.25-34.

<sup>14</sup> Wright (1852) p.135

<sup>15</sup> A. Vol.IX (1789) pp.319-323; Vol.X (1790) pp.131-136; Vol.XVIII (1817) pp.112-125. Samuel Lysons (1763-1819) was a barrister, Director of the Society of Antiquaries and the first keeper of records in the Tower of London. He excavated a number of Roman villas including Bignor in Sussex. The results were published in Reliquiae-Romanae (1801-1817) See Evans (1956) pp.219-224

<sup>16</sup> G.M. Vol.XXXIV (1850) p.24. The same review compared some mural paintings found in London with those in the villa attributed to Cicero at Mola di Gaeta. Comparisons between Romano-British artefacts with those found in Italy were common, see the chapter on objects.



Bathurst's estate was comparatively familiar to the townspeople and other impressive fragments were displayed prominently round the town. For instance, the Corinthian capital unearthed in Mr. Gregory's nursery garden in 1808 had been re-erected near the Abbey grounds and several of the prosperous townspeople had accumulated small collections of artefacts.

But if these old accounts had made people familiar with their Roman past, they had also drawn attention to the steady loss and destruction of the remains. Many of the features noted by Stukeley and Rudder had already disappeared. Their books were both a record of new discoveries and a record of what had been lost due to development and neglect. In the 1820s and 30s a large area to the south of the town, including the medieval Shambles had been pulled down. This had been regarded as the poorest part of the town and its removal and the construction of a culverted water supply were seen as an improvement. But no regard had been given to what might have lain underneath and been destroyed as a result of this activity. No complaints were heard and no one individual put themselves forward to keep an eye on any possible antiquities, as had been the case in other parts of the country.<sup>17</sup> As Beecham remarked, "The taste for preserving remains of bygone taste and genius is of such recent date. Little has been preserved, but mutilated parts, which like the bones of the mastodon leave to the imagination alone the magnitude and configuration of the whole."<sup>18</sup> Roach Smith was more optimistic. After visiting the town in 1846, his opinion was that, "it would take a volume to do justice to the vestiges of ancient Corinium which are still in existence and we are now convinced that many interesting discoveries are likely to be made."<sup>19</sup>

### *Social And Economic Cirencester*

In the medieval period, the town had been a centre of cloth production and the Abbey was a reminder of those prosperous times. In fact Daniel Defoe, who visited the town in the early 1700s, considered that, "Cirencester is still a very

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, Roach Smith in London and Lee in Caerleon.

<sup>18</sup> Beecham (1842) p.196. It could be argued that the absence of remains left greater scope for the imagination; an idea I will return to.

<sup>19</sup> W.G.S. 11<sup>th</sup>, August 1846

good town, populous, rich, full of clothiers and doing a good trade in wool”.<sup>20</sup> In 1779, Rudder mentions two other industries, carpet weaving and stocking frame knitting which he says were the chief occupation in the town. But by 1849 the French wars and mechanisation had finally put an end to the wool trade and the town had become more reliant on arable agriculture in the surrounding countryside. It was to assist this new farming activity that there were 80 enclosure acts in the neighbourhood between 1760 and 1800.

Cirencester's dependence on agricultural production left the town vulnerable to the fluctuating fortunes of that one industry and the local newspaper made frequent references to the “distressed state of agriculture”.<sup>21</sup> The prospects of the industry after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 caused particular apprehension, as the report of a meeting of the Cotteswold Naturalist Club in 1849 suggests. The President is said to have referred to the head of Ceres on the newly uncovered mosaic, as, “Starting in horror at the advance of free trade.”<sup>22</sup>

Although there was continuing concern about social unrest and the effects of free trade, Cirencester began to profit as a result of the general improvement in agricultural prosperity that began around 1850.<sup>23</sup> In 1849 a trade directory described the town as having, “A pleasing and highly respectable appearance and its inhabitants-many of whom are opulent, seem to enjoy a large share of domestic comfort and prosperity. It is lighted by gas, well paved and effectively supplied with good water.”<sup>24</sup> There was a steady increase in population from 4,130 in 1801 to 6,096 in 1851. In 1843 the Great Western railway opened a line which linked Cirencester to the main line to London and this facilitated the flow of visitors,

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<sup>20</sup> Defoe (Penguin ed. 1971) p.359.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, “The depression which weighs down the energies of the peoples of this kingdom residing in the agricultural districts is apparent at every assemblage of those dependent upon trade and commerce for their support.” (W.G.S. 24<sup>th</sup>, September, 1849) This comment was in a report of an application made by Great Western Railways to pay less towards the poor rates in Cirencester.

<sup>22</sup> Proceedings of the C.N.F.C. Vol.I (1853) p.48.

<sup>23</sup> The social concerns were fairly typical. For instance, The paper described a lecture by the Chartist leader in the Temperance Hall in 1849 as “sewing seeds of social discord and discontent.” (W.G.S. 7<sup>th</sup>, May, 1849) The same edition reported that it had received a letter suggesting that the farmers of the Cotswolds should: “Unite for mutual defence in a political crisis. They should bear in mind the ‘emblem of the bundle of sticks, union is strength.’”

<sup>24</sup> Hunt & Co. Directory of Gloucester and Bristol (1849) p.81.



anxious to see the Roman mosaics. The clearance of old buildings and the provision of sewers, gas and water had all meant considerable building activity involving tunnelling through the foundations of the old town.<sup>25</sup> But the local government structure remained archaic. Local affairs were administered through the court of the Lord of the Manor and the Poor Law Guardians were appointed by Lord Bathurst. It was not until 1876 that the town was finally incorporated and thus able to elect a council.

Lord Bathurst played a pivotal role in the life of the town. The first Lord Bathurst had inherited the family estates in 1704. He was a Tory and as a result fell from political grace during the Whig ascendancy following the death of Queen Anne in 1714. Unlike the Whig landed aristocracy who often moved their estates away from centres of population in order to achieve an uncluttered rural aspect, Bathurst chose to emphasise his ties with the local community. His house, Cirencester Park, is situated in the town, only separated from the street by a large stone wall: a position which seems to symbolise his dominant place in the local society. The fourth Lord Bathurst continued this close association with the town and its activities. He was the Lord of the Manor and as such he was the automatic choice as figurehead for any activity. It was entirely typical that he should provide the land for the new agricultural college in 1845 and that when the mosaics were uncovered in 1849, he should offer to build a museum to house them on his land.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from Lord Bathurst, there were a number of professional men in the town whose names – Brown, Bowley, Brewin, Mullings, Newmarch and Cripps – occur again and again in the membership lists of groups and committees. They were solicitors, surveyors and merchants and, like many middle-class men in a similar position in the middle of the nineteenth century, they devoted much of their spare time to organising and running societies and charitable affairs. But certainly at this stage, no one person was either able or willing to put himself forward as a leader

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<sup>25</sup> When Wilfred Cripps reported on his excavations on the basilica site later in the century, he explained that he had been unable to follow the curving wall of the apse because, "The public street under which it then runs, with its sewer, gas and water pipes, cannot be easily disturbed. It seems certain that in placing the sewer the very foundations of the Roman walling were removed by blasting." (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, Second Series, 1897-1899 Vol.XVII, p.204)

<sup>26</sup> Bathurst's father, the third earl, had ceased to play any part in national politics after the 1832 Reform Bill. He felt it would "destroy not reform the constitution." (Dictionary of National Biography)

or potential source of influence to rival Lord Bathurst. This was probably due to the archaic method of local government, which did not allow for the development of an alternative power base until after incorporation in 1876. Another possible factor allowing his dominance to continue, could have been that several of these families were long established Quakers, which put them somewhat outside the normal ruling group.<sup>27</sup> The only remaining source of possible influence within the town was the Agricultural College, which had been established in 1845, again on land donated by Bathurst. The college attracted lecturers from outside the town, several of whom were to take a leading role in the archaeological activity following the 1849 discoveries.

### *The 1849 Discoveries and Archaeological Activities*

When the workmen uncovered the mosaics in August 1849, it was the Agricultural College's Professor of Geology and Botany, John Buckman {Plate VII, p. 257}, who cleared away the debris, assisted by a group of students from the college. It was clear that if they were to be put on show permanently then they would have to be moved and it was at this point that Lord Bathurst offered to pay the cost of removal and storage and to build a museum to house them on estate land. Buckman described the flurry of activity to save the mosaics. "Tracings of the floors, as they were gradually explored, were made by Mr. Cox of Cirencester, assisted by the vicar and some of the professors of the Royal Agricultural College, and even a few students shared in the work. A busy scene it was to see all these volunteers kneeling and patiently tracing, stone by stone the complicated details, of which the colours were carefully matched by Mr. Cox."<sup>28</sup> He had devised an ingenious system to raise the pavements and the brick structure on which they stood. They were stored, part in the local church and the rest on the lawn in front of Bathurst's mansion, until a museum was finally completed in 1856.

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<sup>27</sup> The Brewers, the Bowleys and the Browns were all Quakers. In 1846, Christopher Bowley built the Temperance Hall; "A large and handsome building...open to all meetings and lectures of a scientific or moral character." (*Kelly's Directory*, 1856) It was reported that the Friends Meeting House could seat up to seven hundred people.

<sup>28</sup> *A.J.* Vol.XIII (1856) p.215.



John Buckman was a self-made man. He was born in Cheltenham in 1814 and after a private education, he became a pupil of a surgeon apothecary, before going to London to study botany, geology and chemistry.<sup>29</sup> He was actively involved in the Cheltenham Philosophical Institute, founded in 1823, and wrote regular articles on geology and the natural sciences for the local Cheltenham newspaper.<sup>30</sup> In 1846 he was appointed a Professor and curator at the Birmingham Philosophical Institute. In the same year he was one of the founding members of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club, a group whose interests were mainly in the natural history of the area.<sup>31</sup> In 1848 he was appointed Professor of Geology and Botany at the Agricultural College in Cirencester. The wide range of topics covered in his books would suggest that he was a man of many interests, as a comment from the Cotteswold Field Club would seem to confirm. "Mr. Buckman... is extremely wanted, though were he to present himself wherever he is wished for, he must divide himself into as many parts as he has friends."<sup>32</sup>

The discovery of the pavements, and the proposed museum, created a great deal of interest and considerable press coverage, so it is perhaps not surprising that Buckman should also write about the discoveries. In 1850 he and another Cirencester resident, Charles Newmarch, published a book, The Remains of Roman Art in Ancient Corinium. They say that their purpose was to collect together all the information about the scattered antiquities of Corinium. "By means of accurate drawings and descriptions, to afford to the antiquary, and to the man of taste, an opportunity of forming conclusions as to the state of the people who occupied this interesting station at a period long prior to the one marked by modern

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<sup>29</sup> This lack of specialisation was quite typical of the period. In 1841, the scientist Thomas Huxley, is reported as studying chemistry, history, Latin, Greek, algebra, geometry and physics whilst apprenticed to a doctor.

<sup>30</sup> These were published later and included Our Triangle: geology, archaeology and botany of the most picturesque and interesting spots of Cheltenham (1942) and A Guide to Pittville: containing an analysis of Pittville's saline waters (1842). He continued to be a prolific author over the next twenty years, writing books on archaeology, geology and different farming methods.

<sup>31</sup> Proceedings of the C.N.F.C. Vol.I (1853).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid* 5<sup>th</sup>, August 1851.

civilisation.”<sup>33</sup> He hoped that the detailed review of the Cirencester remains would, “contribute something to the general history of the Roman occupation of Britain.”

Buckman described the town. “Corinium was a city of great importance under the Roman rule, notwithstanding that the ravages of time, and, still worse, the destructiveness of anti-conservative proprietors, have obliterated much valuable evidence.”<sup>34</sup> After giving a general description of the town, its roads, fortifications and architecture, there are several chapters devoted to detailed descriptions of the mosaics, their designs and their chemical and geological properties. Two main themes ran through the descriptions. The first was a desire to demonstrate the utility of the finds and the way in which a detailed analysis of the production methods could assist contemporary manufacturers to improve their own methods. The second theme was a concern with the mosaics as art. They were not presented as examples of flooring in Roman houses, but as examples of beautiful objects completely detached from their original purpose.<sup>35</sup> He compared the figures on the mosaics with “the finest Greek schools” to be found in the British Museum’s collections and quoted the approval of the sculptor, Richard Westmacott, as justification for his views. “Interesting as these pavements are, as monuments of past time, they have a further claim on our attention for the qualities of art exhibited in them... Here is a grandeur of form, dignity of character, and great breadth of treatment, which strongly reminds me of the finest Greek schools... Such works were produced after examples of the very highest reaches of art.”<sup>36</sup>

To convey the beauty of the mosaics, Buckman used comparisons with Roman examples. For instance he quoted an article in the A.J. in which the author compared the Cirencester mosaics with, “the gorgeous floors of the Vatican Museum rescued from the ruins of Hadrian’s Villa and other decaying edifices of

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<sup>33</sup> Buckman (1850) p.vi. They point out that the illustrations were provided by “that ingenious invention the Talbotype.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>35</sup> This was noted by another Cirencester archaeologist, Wilfred Cripps, in 1898. “Even in modern times competent archaeologists have been content with the discovery of fine tessellated pavements and other objects now preserved in the local museum, and seem to have directed too little attention to the plan and structure of the buildings containing them, or the relation of these buildings to the town itself.” (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, Second Series, Vol.XVII, p.201.

<sup>36</sup> Buckman (1856) p.46.



the Romans in Italy.”<sup>37</sup> And, “under Roman rule, this colonial settlement possessed temples and dwellings of like magnificence, and evidencing the same principles of design as those which characterised the mother country.”<sup>38</sup> It would seem that it was only by comparing them with the very best that he could do justice to the Cirencester remains. There is even a sense that he regarded them as equal in artistic worth to mosaics found in Rome: a very different view from conventional thoughts about the relationship between Britain and Rome.

Buckman was anxious to continue with the excavations, as he wrote, “It is to be regretted that no systematic plan of investigation about the places where stone work has been found has yet been undertaken.”<sup>39</sup> It is even possible that he wrote the book to raise funds to further the work, but if that is the case, he did not say so, and therefore we can only speculate about his motivation.<sup>40</sup> In the preface he acknowledges the support he had received from the public, a fact that is emphasised by the very long list of subscribers which follows.<sup>41</sup> Lack of funds continued to be a problem as is evident from the reports which he gave to the Archaeological Institute. In March 1851, he reported the results of a recent dig in the Watermoor district of the town and noted that these would be continued when funds became available. His next report to the Institute in the autumn noted that a local antiquary, Mr. Thomas Brown, had paid the costs for the summer’s activities, but he was now appealing for, “the friendly aid of archaeologists” to add to local resources which were not “fully adequate”. In October 1851, Buckman and Newmarch placed an advertisement in The Times appealing for funds to carry out the first systematic excavation at Cirencester.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> He is quoting an article in the A.J. Vol.VI (1849) p.330.

<sup>38</sup> Buckman (1856) p.18. His use of the term ‘mother country’ is interesting, as this was the way in which relations between Britain and her colonies were characterised later in the nineteenth century.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.19.

<sup>40</sup> In a court case in 1858, the Cirencester publisher, Bailey alleged that a third person was infringing his copyright to the book. In his testimony, Buckman stated that, with the exception of the chapter on coins, he was the only author and had sold the copyright to Bailey prior to the original publication in 1850.

<sup>41</sup> The list includes seven hundred and forty nine names in all, including Prince Albert. (See p.161 for information on lists of subscribers)

<sup>42</sup> The Times, 18<sup>th</sup>, October, 1851. It is interesting that these appeals for funds were being made at the same time as the British Government was helping to fund large scale excavations in the Middle East such as Layard’s at Nineveh. The irony was not lost on Roach Smith, commenting on the lack of research on

The difficulties they were experiencing fund raising would suggest that Lord Bathurst was unwilling to donate money for further excavations. It is difficult to imagine that, had he been willing to do so, there would not have been effusive thanks and comments on his generosity, as was the case when he paid for building the museum. In the absence of any evidence, it is only possible to speculate as to the reasons why this might have been the case. One possible explanation could be that he was not interested in the archaeological finds themselves, particularly the more mundane domestic artefacts, which were the main finds in these later digs. The mosaic pavements had attracted a large amount of attention precisely because they were dramatic and seemed to create a powerful link with the Roman past, with all its associations of wealth and opulence. Bathurst might have wished to be seen to be involved with those associations, particularly with the museum, whose central position in the town emphasised his authority. His comparative lack of interest in archaeology generally can be inferred from the remarks he made when welcoming the annual meeting of the B.A.A. in Cirencester in 1868. "Although archaeology cannot vie with the cheery excitement of the chase, nor possess the all absorbing interest of the turf, yet it tends not to extravagance and ruin. Surely the student who pores over the ancient remains of Greece and Rome... cannot be said to have passed a flat, unprofitable day."<sup>43</sup>

### *The Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club*

What stands out from the description of archaeological activity in Cirencester is the absence of any attempt to form a local group to excavate and preserve the remains. Such a group could have served as a focus for raising interest in conservation and funds for excavation. In other parts of the country, the energy and enthusiasm generated by new discoveries had led to the formation of local archaeological associations and societies. One possible reason could have been the existence of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club (C.N.F.C.), which might have been seen as a potential focus for archaeological activity in the area.

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Hadrian's Wall. "It is commendable to institute societies for researches at Nineveh and Babylon; but it is inconsistent to leave the no less wondrous monuments of our own country unexplored." (Roach Smith (1853) p.155).

<sup>43</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.XXV (1869) p.25.



The first meeting of the Club was held on July 7, 1846 at the Black Horse Inn near Cheltenham. It was formed to “investigate the natural history, antiquities, agriculture and other objects worthy of interest in the Cheltenham district.”<sup>44</sup> Among its members were several Oxford professors, the Principal of the Agricultural College in Cirencester; several members of the Cheltenham Literary and Philosophical Society and a number of professional men, including solicitors, surveyors and doctors, many of them from Cirencester. John Buckman, then still at the ‘Lit and Phil’ in Birmingham was at the inaugural meeting and remained an active member after he moved to the Agricultural College in 1848. Although the group visited Roman sites on their summer walks, were shown the museum at Cirencester and were lectured by Buckman on the excavations, the primary interest of most of the members was the natural sciences, especially botany and geology. These were seen as, “A healthy and most fascinating, far more than either, a most holy study. For what is the study of Natural History, but an approach to the Creator and all his works?”<sup>45</sup>

The format of the meetings was to have breakfast together in a local inn, followed by a walk to some point of interest in the area and then a return to the inn for dinner. The impression given by the journal is that these meetings were a pleasant social gathering, providing a group of like-minded ‘Gentlemen of Science’ with a congenial forum in which they could learn a little and enjoy themselves at the same time.<sup>46</sup> Buckman gave papers on the archaeological activities in Cirencester as well as on geology, botany and agriculture. In 1854 he became the secretary, a post he held until 1860. In other words, his time and energy were devoted to the C.N.F.C. rather than to the formation of a specifically archaeological group. It could be argued that it was the very diversity of his activities and interests that prevented him from being more effective in Cirencester. There must have been many other factors involved in the failure to organise an archaeological group, one of which

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<sup>44</sup> Proceedings C.N.F.C. Vol.I (1853) p.12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.14.

<sup>46</sup> I use the term ‘Gentlemen of Science’ advisedly. It is the title of the Thackray and Morrell study of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, as the term seems to accurately describe the C.N.F.C. I will discuss this further in the social chapter.

was the pre-eminent position of Lord Bathurst. But I will leave a consideration of these to a later chapter.

### The Museum

The first museum in the town had been started as an addition to the Cirencester public library and reading room, which had been established in 1835. The minutes record the beginnings of a general collection of minerals, fossils and antiquities with a volunteer curator.<sup>47</sup> The variety of objects resembled a “cabinet of curiosities” rather than a systematic collection, ranging from “the musk pod from the musk deer” through “fossils unearthed during the construction of the railway” to a “charred beam from Herculaneum”. The lending library did not flourish, and in 1847 it was taken over and amalgamated with the lending library in the local bookshop, Baily’s. In 1856, a letter from Cannon Powell to Buckman asks him to put the Roman remains from the reading room museum into the new Bathurst Museum that had just opened.<sup>48</sup>

The new museum was built on the Bathurst estate in the centre of the town, opposite the railway station. Lord Bathurst paid for the building, the display cabinets and the caretaker’s wages. Buckman was the first curator, presumably appointed by Bathurst, as were all the subsequent curators. Pictures in the Illustrated London News show a rather nondescript, barn-like building with large arched windows<sup>49</sup> {Plate VIII, p.258}. The main floor area was given to the display of the pavements. No other contents are shown so the readers of the magazine might have concluded that the pavements were the sole exhibits. However, Buckman’s list of the contents and lay-out plan shows a number of cabinets around the walls, containing artefacts arranged according to their material, such as iron, bronzes and pottery. In a talk to the C.N.F.C. in 1857, Buckman said that he felt the main value of the exhibits lay not in their artistic value, but in, “explaining to

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<sup>47</sup> Minute Book of Cirencester Library Co., 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 1836. (In Box 2 (9) Cirencester Public Library).

<sup>48</sup> The letter, dated 5<sup>th</sup>, July 1856, is in a box marked ‘early museum’ in the present Cirencester museum. The box also contained Buckman’s plan of the layout of the museum, a list of the contents in 1856 and the visitors book. The box was one of many in a storeroom and the contents were un-catalogued and did not appear to be sorted in any way.

<sup>49</sup> I.L.N. 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1856.



us some facts connected with the inner life of this interesting people.”<sup>50</sup> The intention had always been that it should be a museum of “Roman Corinium” and in the main this intention was followed. A 1858 newspaper report notes the addition of Etruscan pottery, “mainly for the sake of comparison... as nothing can be more serviceable to the student of antiquities than having seen examples of work from far different countries.”<sup>51</sup> The list of contents includes a note of the artefacts’ donors, but there is no mention of the dates they were found or the locations. A few objects are drawn rather crudely. There is no indication that this list was for anything other than Buckman’s private use. A visitors’ comment book during the early years is full of complaints about the lack of a printed guide or catalogue. It was not until 1867 that Arthur Church, another professor at the Agricultural College and one of Buckman’s successors as museum curator, wrote a proper catalogue.

The visitors’ book records a steady stream of visitors from all over the country, including an official visit from the British Association for the Advancement of Science, meeting in Cheltenham in 1856. In the same year there was also an excursion train from London to Lord Bathurst’s park and 53 of the excursionists visited the Roman Museum. Altogether Buckman estimated that there were around 2,000 visitors in the first year. The number of visitors from London and the south-east was an indication of both the national interest generated by the mosaics, and a demonstration of just how easy travel had become as a result of the railway.

### Later Activity

After the burst of activity following the discovery of the mosaics and the building of the museum, the level of interest in archaeological work in Cirencester died down considerably. Small-scale excavation continued and Buckman reported the results in the *Archaeological Journal*. The finds were deposited in the museum, which continued to attract a number of visitors.<sup>52</sup> Buckman left the town after a major disagreement with the college authorities in 1863. The dispute was

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<sup>50</sup> Proceedings C.N.F.C. Vol.II.

<sup>51</sup> W.G.S. 11<sup>th</sup>, September 1858.

<sup>52</sup> There had been nearly four thousand visitors between 1856 and 1858. (W.G.S. 11<sup>th</sup>, September 1858.)



concerned with his supposed neglect of his college duties and it is possible that his interest in matters archaeological and Roman had diverted him from his work.<sup>53</sup> He retired to farm in Dorset. But his interest in the Roman past continued and he reappeared at the Chedworth villa site in 1865, where he helped the owner, Lord Eldon, arrange his museum.<sup>54</sup>

Bathurst chose a soldier, Captain Charles Abbott, as the replacement for Buckman, and then Arthur Church, a professor of Chemistry at the Agricultural College. It was Church who produced the first printed catalogue in 1867. In the preface he remarks, "The absence of labels and a catalogue has been felt as a drawback to the value and usefulness of the collection. The present arrangement of the objects in the museum is not satisfactory."<sup>55</sup> By 1912 when the fifth curator, Edward Sewell, was appointed, the museum was in a very dirty and neglected condition and the exhibits were in "a hopeless muddle."<sup>56</sup> The state of the collection is rather surprising in view of the fact that material continued to be added throughout the later years of the century. Work on a proper supply of water and a sewerage system during the 1870s had led to extensive tunnelling through the foundations of the older buildings of the town. The surveyors responsible for much of the work were John and Thomas Bravander who recorded the Roman remains as they were found. The artefacts they collected were donated to the Bathurst Museum in 1881.

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<sup>53</sup> Buckman (1862) Sayce (1992) pp.59-60

<sup>54</sup> Chedworth is a few miles north of Cirencester. The villa site was discovered in 1864 on land owned by Lord Eldon. James Farrer excavated it and Eldon paid for roofing to protect the site and for a museum to display the finds, which Buckman helped to set up. In view of his failure to produce a catalogue for the Cirencester museum, it is ironic that that he did so for the Chedworth site. (Buckman (1872) His co author was Robert Hall, a member of the C.N.F.C. In the catalogue he advises his readers to visit the Cirencester museum, but then adds a sting in the tail. "The museum at the villa is necessarily on a small scale, yet it possesses examples of a large number of articles to be found within the cases at Cirencester." (p.13). In view of the closeness of the two sites, is it too fanciful to suggest that there might have been an element of competition between the two sites and their noble proprietors?

<sup>55</sup> Church (1867) He does not give his reasons for this remark and neither does he appear to have re-arranged the contents as his catalogue follows Buckman's plan closely.

<sup>56</sup> Note in Sewell's hand writing in the box of early museum papers. (see note 49 above) Sewell (1933) pp.317-321. The box also contains correspondence (in 1929) between Sewell and Buckman's son, Percy, who wanted some Roman artefacts from the museum collection that he regarded as his father's property. Sewell told him that Bathurst would not "entertain any idea of their removal." It is clear that the estate's view was that the artefacts had been discovered on Bathurst land and were therefore Bathurst property. In another memo, Sewell records that what artefacts Buckman had retained and taken away with him had been sold to the British Museum in 1930 and therefore lost to Cirencester.



In 1890 Wilfred Cripps, a wealthy local property dealer, began to create another museum in the town. In an attempt to locate the Roman basilica, he and his wife, Helena, had paid for a series of excavations in 1897-8.<sup>57</sup> They were assisted by the country's leading Romano British archaeologist, Professor F. Haverfield.<sup>58</sup> In order to display their collection, the Cripps built an extension to their house in Cirencester that became known as the Cripps Museum. It would appear that during the last decades of the century, both Bathurst and Cripps were intent on extending their collections regardless both each other or of the wider interests of the community as a whole. This situation was only finally resolved when the two collections were amalgamated in 1937 under the direction of the local authority.

### Ownership

In Chapter 2 I pointed out the importance attached to ownership of the Roman past and its symbolic value as an indicator of social standing and aesthetic taste. If this was the case, then questions of who owned what and who should have access to the artefacts from the past were of considerable significance. Cirencester provides a good example of the way in which these issues played a part in the social standing and perceived authority in a specific social structure. Many local people were reluctant to donate their finds to the local museum. I have already mentioned the Cripps' Museum, but this is only the most outstanding example of a more general trend. When Buckman compiled his list of artefacts in 1856 he wrote on the front page, "the articles belonging to J.B. (James Buckman) are deposited in this museum for the benefit of science. They can be removed by him if not properly taken care of." In fact, most of the articles in the museum were described as "on loan" from various local people. This apparent unwillingness to donate objects to the museum in Cirencester is unusual. In Colchester and Caerleon, where local museums had been established at approximately the same time, collectors appeared eager to donate objects to a local collection. I would argue that their failure to do

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<sup>57</sup> Cripps had determined the site of the basilica by studying the configuration of roads through the town in order to determine the centre of the Roman settlement, where he believed both the basilica and the forum would have stood. This is a good illustration of improved methodology since 1850, when the Caerleon antiquarians had built their museum on top of the Roman centre. Cripps said he used as a guide the excavations carried out a few years before at the Roman site at Silchester. (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, Second Series, Vol.XVII, p.202).

<sup>58</sup> Haverfield reported the excavations in the national journals. See A. Vol.LXIX (1920) pp.161-200.

so in Cirencester could be due to a perception that the museum, rather than being owned by the town itself, was seen as the property of the Lord of the Manor, in the person of Lord Bathurst. An example of the way in which this perception had been created occurs in the A.J. When Newmarch told the A.I. about the recent discoveries in Dyer Street, he, “warmly eulogised the liberality of Earl Bathurst, who had determined to erect forthwith a museum, for the secure reception of these remains discovered on his property.” Mr Morgan (Octavius Morgan of Caerleon), “proposed cordial thanks to the noble proprietor of the ancient Corinium.”<sup>59</sup> The use of such language had the effect of ensuring that the Bathurst name and estate were perceived as being synonymous with the Roman past of the town. The archaeologists had uncovered the importance of the Roman town, the pavements had demonstrated the wealth of its citizens, but Bathurst was the owner and therefore their legitimate successor. I examine the complex inter-relationships between the town, the archaeologists, Lord Bathurst and the Roman past in Chapter 8: The Social Context.

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<sup>59</sup> A.J. Vol.VI (1849) p.396.



## **CHAPTER 5: COLCHESTER**

In 1846 a group of leading members of the B.A.A. went on a two-day excursion to the Essex town of Colchester. The intention was to encourage local members to “make researches” and “afford the members residing in London an opportunity of offering suggestions and co-operation.”<sup>1</sup> Colchester was chosen because it was the one British town that figured in the Roman texts to any great extent. On the first day they were shown the castle, the walls, several churches and the ruins of the monastery. In the evening there was a dinner, after which local antiquities were exhibited and the day’s findings discussed. The following day was spent viewing local collections. These included a museum to which “the corporation has devoted a room in the town hall”<sup>2</sup>; a collection of Roman bronzes and coins owned by the businessman, Mr. Vint; and the collections of two other members of the local gentry, in which they saw antique marbles and mosaics.

### **Sources of Knowledge**

The Claudian invasion of 43 C.E., in which Roman troops defeated the British tribes, is described in both Suetonius’ account of the reign of Claudius (17-24) and in Dio Cassius (LX. 19-24). They describe the capture of Camulodunum, the major settlement of the British Catuvellauni tribe, whose ruler, Cunobeline, was described by Suetonius as ‘King of the Britons’. After the success of the initial invasion, Claudius returned in triumph to Rome. The victorious Roman troops used the site of the Catuvellaunian capital as the site for their first fortress, which within a short time, was transformed into a Colonia Civitas for retired legionary soldiers.

Tacitus tells how Camulodunum (Colchester) became the provincial capital and was the site of a temple to the God Claudius built soon after the invasion. He describes the temple as, “Like the citadel of an eternal tyranny, while the priests, chosen for its service, were bound under the pretext of religion to pour out their fortunes like water.”<sup>3</sup> Tacitus then gives an account of the revolt of the British

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<sup>1</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.II p.364.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.367.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, Annals, xiv, xxx

tribes led by the Iceni Queen, Boudica, in 61 CE. He describes the undefended Roman citizens of Colchester fleeing into the temple, which was taken by storm and the defenders put to death. Once the revolt was put down, Tacitus describes how the British were eventually reconciled to Roman rule: "Little by little the British went astray into alluring vices: to the promenade, the bath, the well appointed dinner table. The simple natives gave the name of culture to this factor of their slavery."<sup>4</sup> However once Colchester had ceased to play a role in the wider world, the town is not mentioned in the Roman histories again. There is no account of the Romano-British town itself, which, judging from the buildings that remained standing and the wealth of artefacts found, must have been quite extensive. It is no wonder that Rev. Cutts, the secretary of the Essex Archaeological Society (E.A.S.) remarked, "These great writers have given us but the merest skeleton of the Roman history in Britain."<sup>5</sup>

The first antiquarian account of the Roman remains in Colchester appeared in Camden's Britannia (1586) in which he noted the evidence of Roman occupation in the town, but did not think it was the site of the original Colonia Civitas. The 1720 edition of the Britannia placed Camulodunum, "the chief quarter of the Romans" at Maldon and such was Camden's stature in the eyes of all subsequent antiquarians that this statement led to endless controversies and disagreements. In 1748 the local historian, Philip Morant, studied the Antonine Itinerary and surveyed the remaining earthworks. He concluded, "By laying all circumstances together, it may appear to any unprejudiced person, that Colchester hath a better right to reclaim Camulodunum as its own than any other place where it had been fixed by writers ancient and modern."<sup>6</sup> Morant thought it probable that the town walls were Roman, but that the castle had been built later using, "broken Roman bricks taken from the ruins of more ancient edifices."<sup>7</sup> William Stukeley visited the town in

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<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, Annals, xiv, 29-37

<sup>5</sup> Trans. E.A.S. Vol.I (1858) p.100.

<sup>6</sup> Morant (1748) p.12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



1759. He “survey’d the wonderful works of Cunobeline”, and produced drawings of the earthworks around the town.<sup>8</sup>

The antiquarians also retold the story of the Roman conquest of the town and the revolt under Boudica. Some idea of the extent to which their work was influenced by the Roman texts can be gained by comparing their version of events with those of Tacitus, quoted earlier. For instance, in descriptions of the significance of the temple of Claudius, it is clear that Tacitus was both the source of their information and provided a model for how the events should be described. Thus, in 1825, a local historian, Thomas Cromwell, wrote that the temple was, “A fortress built to ensure their perpetual bondage, whose rapacious priests would not abate their demands for its support.”<sup>9</sup> In 1853 the Rev. Jenkins described the temple as, “A symbol of Rome’s eternal domination over the conquered Britons,” and, “the exactions of the college of priests exhausted the wealth of a rich and populous province.”<sup>10</sup> In 1858, another local antiquarian, Dr. Duncan, said, “In the eyes of the Britons, it seemed the citadel of eternal slavery. The priests... devoured the whole substance of the country.”<sup>11</sup> It is clear that the nineteenth century image of the British revolt was formed through reading Tacitus. They are a testament, both to the power of his description and to the hold that the classical texts had on the thoughts and imagination of the nineteenth century antiquarians.<sup>12</sup>

### *Roman Remains in 1846*

Following his visit in 1846, Roach Smith wrote a description of the remains for the B.A.A. J. He noted the rapid rate at which the remains were being destroyed due to the, “the increase of population, in the demands of luxury, and in necessary alterations and improvements.”<sup>13</sup> But in spite of these changes there was still a considerable amount to be seen. He described the wall which, “although levelled in

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<sup>8</sup> See Piggott (1985) p.147 and fn. p.401. In Piggott’s opinion these drawings are still useful as a record of the earthworks around Colchester in the middle of the eighteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Cromwell (1825) p.29.

<sup>10</sup> Jenkins (1852) pp.9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Duncan (1858) p.29.

<sup>12</sup> General histories of Roman Britain were just as reliant on Tacitus’ descriptions. For example, see Rev. Scarth. Roman Britain, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1883) p.48

<sup>13</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.II (1846).

parts, can be traced distinctly almost throughout its course of a mile and three quarters.”<sup>14</sup> He included a plan of the remains of the Western Gate of the town, the Balcerne Gate, with its one arch and a room still intact. But Smith thought that the most striking feature was the preponderance of Roman bricks and tiles in all the buildings and the confusion to which this could lead. For instance, the Norman castle at the centre of the town, “presents many points of similarity to the Roman style... and the tiles have been so plentifully used, and disposed so perfectly in the Roman style, as to impress upon the spectator a notion of much earlier antiquity.”<sup>15</sup> In spite of this, he did not consider that any part of the castle could be Roman, although he thought it likely that it stood on the site of an important Roman building. Finally, Roach Smith described some of the more remarkable artefacts, such as the statue of a sphinx found on the building site of a new hospital in 1820, and the antique bronzes in the collection of Mr. Vint.<sup>16</sup> Roach Smith noted that a large number of objects had been unearthed to the west of the town, outside the Balcerne Gate. This was on the main road between Colchester and London, and according to Roman tradition, would have been the main cemetery. During the nineteenth century it had been the site for both the new hospital and the union workhouse and had yielded, “a vast quantity of remains, such as were commonly deposited with the dead.”<sup>17</sup>

Roach Smith’s article suggests that there was still considerable evidence of the Roman past to be seen in Colchester, although the re-use of Roman building materials was creating difficulties in distinguishing Roman from later constructions.<sup>18</sup> It was also clear that a great deal more evidence was to be discovered underground. The digging and excavating involved in the construction of the railway system, sewers and major public enterprises such as the hospital,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.30.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p.30.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Hay had donated the Sphinx to the hospital. When he died most of his large collection of antiquities were bequeathed to the Museum of the Scottish Antiquaries in Edinburgh and so lost to Colchester. Modern archaeologists think that Vint’s bronzes were probably forgeries. They are of a quantity and type which makes it unlikely that they were a part of a store of grave goods. It is possible that they were manufactured in Italy in the eighteenth century, in one of the many workshops that were turning out ‘antiquities’ for the unwary tourists. See Jones (1990) Chapter on Faking in Europe from the Renaissance to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>17</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.II (1846) p.43.

<sup>18</sup> The preponderance of Roman materials is still a characteristic feature of Colchester today.



workhouse, a corn exchange and a new town hall, were revealing quantities of small artefacts and extensive evidence of foundation. Some small-scale excavations were being organised, such as that in Mr. Round's garden next to the castle, in 1850, but most of the evidence for the Roman town remained buried beneath Victorian Colchester.

Colchester presented a rather confusing picture to the archaeologists. On the one hand, they had more written evidence of the early Roman period than was the case for any other Roman site in the country. But these written accounts ceased once Colchester no longer played a part on the national stage. Furthermore, unlike some of the other Roman sites, no inscriptions or tombstones had been unearthed which might have thrown light on the life of the city later in the Roman period. As Dr. Duncan remarked, "No inscriptions have been found either in Colchester or on the wall, indicating the Emperor, legions and cohorts, by whom this grand memorial of Roman design and perseverance was erected; yet no other city contains such evidence of continuous occupation."<sup>19</sup> Failing inscriptions, Duncan was forced to rely upon coins, but this evidence was rarely specific. "Very little can be gleaned from them of the date of the erection of the walls of Colchester, but they proved that the Romans occupied the town, during the whole of their stay in Britain."<sup>20</sup> The Romano-British town of Colchester and its inhabitants, both native and Roman, remained obscure. The quantity and variety of artefacts suggested that this had continued to be an important and populous site throughout the Roman period. But how and in what manner it had declined remained a mystery and the re-use of Roman building materials served merely to add another layer of confusion.

### *Social and Economic Colchester*

During the Mediaeval period Colchester had been important for cloth production but by the beginning of the nineteenth century the cloth trade had virtually finished due to technological changes in production. As a result, Colchester had become depressed and run down, reliant on providing goods and services for the surrounding rural areas. Local affairs were in the hands of a corporation, which

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<sup>19</sup> Duncan (1858) p.33

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.35

was dominated by a ruling oligarchy of business and commercial men and which attracted accusations of mismanagement and corruption.<sup>21</sup> The Tory leaders of the corporation vigorously opposed both the 1832 Reform Act and the 1835 Municipal Reform Act, aimed at removing some of the inequalities of the old system. John Taylor, a local businessman, founded the Essex Standard newspaper in 1831 specifically to oppose the reforms. The Liberal faction, elected in 1836, was unable to manage the financial muddle inherited from the un-reformed Tory Corporation, and thus lost power after two years. The Conservatives regained power and held it until the next electoral reform act in 1867. Throughout the rest of the century the public life of Colchester was split between the Anglican Tories on one side and Liberal dissenters on the other; a split which was reflected in all aspects of the town's life, including education, institutions and even archaeology.<sup>22</sup>

The Conservatives maintained their authority through a network of professional men and leading businessmen, who dominated not only the political life of the town, but its economic and social life as well. The same names occur again and again as town councillors, poor-law guardians and improvement commissioners. For instance, Charles Hawkins was a councillor, mayor four times, poor-law guardian, improvement commissioner and leader of the Colchester Conservative Party and was connected through marriage with other influential families. Another network of associations is to be seen in the connections of Richard Mackintosh. He was an active Evangelical Anglican; treasurer of the Castle library; vice-president of the Philosophical Society; a manager of the savings bank; active member of the Botanical and Horticultural Society; of the East Essex Bible Society; and a founder member and voluntary physician of the Essex and Colchester Hospital.<sup>23</sup> Several of the committee member of the Essex Archaeological Society were also active in other spheres – for instance the newspaper editor, John Taylor, and Mr. Laing, who was a mayor of the town on several occasions. There were several Anglican

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<sup>21</sup> See Victoria County History, Vol. IX.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, there were two elementary schools, the National attached to the Anglican Church and the British attached to the Dissenters. I will examine other institutions in the chapter on social implications of my research. The political and social divide in Colchester is a good example of the Tory versus Whig split described by Morris and Roger. (see back p.15, note 20)

<sup>23</sup> V.C.H. Vol. IX p.173.



ministers and one of them, Rev. Cutts, was a secretary to the Society for many years.

The Liberal opposition was based in the many dissenting chapels. In 1829, about one quarter of the population was outside the Anglican Church. One contentious issue was the dissenters' dislike of paying tithes to the established church and it was the fear that the Liberals would put an end to this practice that helped to keep them out of power for so long. Failing elected power, the Liberals brought their influence to bear through such public bodies as the poor-law guardians and the sanitary committee. They also used the press as a mouthpiece, as local antiquarian William Wire noted. "Mr. David Morris, surgeon, informs me that the Liberal party have purchased the Essex and Herts Mercury newspaper to be their organ of publication."<sup>24</sup>

Radical politics also began to play a part in the life of the town. In 1838, the Colchester Working Men's Association was established by small trades-people, encouraged by the Chartist movement. Its members argued for non-violent methods of protest and supported repeal of the Corn Laws. There was sufficient support for these causes to attract large numbers to hear radical speakers, such as the Chartist, Henry Vincent, and the anti Corn Law campaigner, Cobden, when they spoke at meetings in the town.<sup>25</sup> The reaction provoked by working-class activity was uncompromising. "We seriously advise these people to attend to their respective occupations; they will by this course serve themselves much better than by troubling themselves with imaginary grievances and interfering in questions of which they know rather worse than nothing."<sup>26</sup>

Colchester's economic position began to revive in the 1840s largely due to two factors. The first was the construction of the rail link between London on one side and the East coast ports on the other. The boom in trade led to the erection of a Corn Exchange and a flourishing brewery business. The second factor was the construction of a permanent barracks in 1856 to replace the temporary staging post

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<sup>24</sup> W.W.J. 11, September 1843.

<sup>25</sup> W.W.J. 29 November, 1842 and 3 July, 1843. Wire reported that a special train brought people from London to hear Cobden and that the mayor tried to stop the meeting.

<sup>26</sup> E.S. 9<sup>th</sup>, February 1838.

set up for troops on the way to the Crimea. The addition of another three thousand people and their incomes proved to be a welcome boost to local producers and providers of services. As a result of these changes, the population began to increase steadily from 17,790 in 1841 to 23,815 in 1861.

### William Wire and Archaeological Activity

The number of artefacts and remains of buildings discovered in Colchester had risen as building activity in the town increased. But neither the chief citizens nor the council appeared to be interested in conservation. As was often the case in the mid-nineteenth century the necessary drive for a more organised response to preservation was brought about through the energy and enthusiasm of one individual: in Colchester that was William Wire {Plate IX, p.259}.

Wire was a native of Colchester. He had trained as a watchmaker in London and had returned to the town in 1828 to set up his own business. His journal and surviving letters describe purchases of a vast range of artefacts, maps and typographical books over a 15-year period between 1842 and his death in 1857.<sup>27</sup> His journal records his almost daily round of the building sites to enquire about the possible discovery of artefacts. He paid particular attention to the construction site of a new bridge, possibly prompted by the knowledge that river sites had proved to be fruitful sources for archaeological finds.<sup>28</sup> He tried to create a museum for the town, but failed because he had to sell his collection to pay off debts in 1840.<sup>29</sup> Despite financial problems, it was not long before he started buying again. The evidence of his letters and journals suggest that he regarded the study of the past as more than the collection of odd facts and curiosities. He distinguished between collecting objects to learn from them, and collecting antiquities for a cabinet of curiosity, which he termed 'unconsidered trifles'. He described the collecting

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<sup>27</sup> Wire's Journal is in an unpublished notebook in the possession of the Colchester Museum Service (C.M.S.). The service also has a number of letters from Roach Smith to Wire. Wire's letters are in his letter book (1847-1853) in the E.R.O.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Roach Smith described discoveries made on the presumed site of a Roman bridge in the Thames at London. These included bronzes and a "colossal head of Hadrian." (*A.* Vol.XXIX (1842) p.165.

<sup>29</sup> The flyer he had printed to advertise this project proclaimed: "William Wire, watch maker and dealer in antiquities, begs to announce that he has fitted up a room for the express reception of articles of interest or curiosity, to form a nucleus for a museum to be called the Colchester Museum. Terms of admission, either pecuniary or something of interest that will not only enhance but add to the value of such an establishment. All articles deposited are to be considered the property of the museum." Cited in Rudsdale (1946).



habits of the town councillor and leading citizen, Mr. Taylor, and others, as, “purchasing antiquities for a museum without either judgement or discretion.”<sup>30</sup> However there is a certain inconsistency between these scathing comments on the collecting habits of others and his apparent willingness to include all “articles of interest or curiosity” for his own museum. Possibly the interests of a museum proprietor and those of a ‘man of archaeological science’ did not always coincide.<sup>31</sup>

Wire was largely responsible for making contact with antiquarians in other parts of the country. He corresponded for many years with Roach Smith in London, exchanging information and artefacts. It was probably due to this connection that Wire was appointed the Colchester representative for the B.A.A. when it was formed in 1843. He took the position seriously and there are several reports from Wire to the Association’s proceedings. For instance in 1846, he forwarded Roman bracelets and in 1849, he sent a plan and notes of some recently discovered Roman foundations.<sup>32</sup> He visited London to see some recent discoveries and met the antiquarians and antique dealers, Chaffer and Price. He went to the British Museum and was, “struck by the paucity of antiquities found in this country.”<sup>33</sup> Back in Colchester, he showed the sites of the town to the veteran antiquary John Britton and was a part of the group that entertained the B.A.A. in 1846.

Wire not only collected artefacts for his own collection, he also dealt in antiquities commercially, and his journal and letters provide an insight into the antiquities market in the 1840s and 1850s. The social kudos of a collection of antiquities was such that many of the newly-wealthy middle class aspired to own such a collection and this in turn, led to an increased demand for antiquities.

Wire’s letters indicate that he had customers all over the country, including Joseph Clarke in Saffron Walden, Professor Henslow in Cambridge, and the historian H.E. Smith, in Yorkshire, and he sold coins to both Richard Neville and Roach Smith. His main customer was Mr. Acton of Grundisburgh, a wealthy local

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<sup>30</sup> W.W.J. 30<sup>th</sup>, May 1843.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 9: The Meaning of Objects.

<sup>32</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.II (1846) p.101 and Vol.V (1849) p.85.

<sup>33</sup> W.W.J. 19 August, 1843.



landowner.<sup>34</sup> When financial pressures again forced Wire to sell his collections in 1851, he wrote letters to old customers with a list of objects for sale and their price, which throw some light on the value attached to these artefacts.<sup>35</sup> The increased demand for antiquities contributed to the problem of forgeries, a subject that figures prominently in the correspondence between Wire and Roach Smith.<sup>36</sup>

The market for artefacts also caused problems within the town, as the arguments surrounding the Town Hall site illustrate. In 1843 it had been decided to replace the mediaeval moot hall with a new building. Mr. Taylor, a Colchester Councillor, told Wire that the contractors could keep all the building materials, but that any antiquities were to be the property of the town council. When Wire visited the site, the contractor told him that he would like to imprison any man who sold Wire antiquities and to transport Wire himself for buying them. When Wire complained of this, Taylor and John Marsden, (Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge) denied that Wire had been excluded from the site. However Marsden and Vint both threatened to get the sack for any man selling antiquities.<sup>37</sup> None of the participants in this drama was disinterested, Vint and Taylor were councillors and private collectors; Marsden was in charge of the Disney museum collection at Cambridge and Wire himself was both a collector and a dealer. It is also more than likely that the workmen involved would have been only too keen to trade if they thought they could get away with it.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> When Wire died in 1857, Acton bought his remaining collection. When Acton died three years later, Mr. Round of the E.A.S. bought those parts of the collection connected with Colchester and Essex and offered to sell them to the society. According to the Society's minutes, forty pounds and eight shillings were received in response to a circular requesting funds to buy the collection from Round. (E.A.S. Minutes 13<sup>th</sup>, February 1862) Wire's journal and letter book were with the collection and hence have survived.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 9: The Meaning of Objects.

<sup>36</sup> For instance Wire's journal records the discovery of a large cache of artefacts discovered on the new poor house site. They included daggers with Greek names on the handles; a Roman urn: impressed intaglios with Egyptian hieroglyphics and busts in an Egyptian style. "It is said by some antiquarians that the whole of the above, excepting the urn, are of modern fabrication." (W.W.J. 19 March, 1844) See Chapter 9: The Meaning of Objects.

<sup>37</sup> Marsden had bought an antiquity from a workman and got the man sacked for selling it. (W.W.J. 16, September 1843)

<sup>38</sup> Wire's journal describes several incidents that demonstrate the workmen's' awareness of the market. "A labouring man showed me a small brass figure of Jupiter he had ploughed up in a field. I offered him money, but having previously offered it to Mr. Vint, he would not sell it to me. It is engraved in Archaeologia Vol.XXXI." (11<sup>th</sup>, May 1843) "A labouring man digging up a tree, found an earthen urn containing 951 silver coins, which he took up to London and sold for ten pounds. Kept very secret." (9<sup>th</sup>, May 1854)



Finally, it was Wire who was the moving force behind the meeting, held on August 14, 1850, to set up an archaeological association in Colchester. The minutes record the group's aims. "Obtain and record faithfully accounts of antiquities; to collect and preserve any heraldic or genealogical notices; to investigate the ecclesiastical, castellated and domestic architecture and to act to preserve from threatened destruction any interesting monuments of past times; (and finally) to collect coins and antiquities of any country, but most particularly of this town."<sup>39</sup> The membership of the new society consisted of local businessmen, such as John Laing and John Taylor, and a number of local ministers. It is noticeable that there are no local gentry in the list. At the first meeting in September, Wire was made secretary, but in November it was resolved that, "Rev. Medley be requested to act ad Hon Secretary." The following year it was decided to hold the meetings in the day, which necessarily excluded working men such as Wire. The minutes do not say who proposed either these changes or their reasons for doing so, but Wire believed that it was to exclude him. "After all my efforts and expense, I find that they have approved as secretary someone who knows very little of antiquities... Fancy a secretary of a successful body who is unacquainted with the subjects that may be brought under discussion. Autocracy of power usurps the place of autocracy of mind... I was told it was impossible for me to know much of antiquity because I had not had a classical education."<sup>40</sup> In fact, by the summer of 1851, Wire had stopped attending the meetings all together.

In September 1852, it was proposal that the Colchester group should be extended to include members from the whole county of Essex. The committee set up to plan the new group, consisted of Rev. Jenkins and Dr. Duncan from Colchester, and included Mr. Round from the castle and Rev. Marsden.

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<sup>39</sup> Minutes of Colchester Archaeological Association 14<sup>th</sup>, August 1850 (In E.M.S.)

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Roach Smith 6<sup>th</sup>, September 1850. In another letter he complained, "I have been obliged to resign the secretaryship, they made it too hot for me. It is assumed that no one can understand archaeology, but had a classical education backed by a long purse." As to his replacement, Rev. Medley he says, "But there is this in his favour, not one of the others can find fault with him or laugh at his ignorance. Besides which he has had a classical education." (12<sup>th</sup>, February 1851) The tone of the letters is almost paranoid.



Mr. Disney became president after Lord Braybrook, Richard Neville's father, declined the post.<sup>41</sup> The Bishop of the Diocese and the Lord Lieutenant of the county were invited to be patrons. The intention to include representatives of all the leading citizens of the county indicate that the Essex Archaeological Society was determined to be more socially 'upmarket' than the town based society had been. As if to confirm this, the rules stipulated that the vice presidents were to be either noblemen or MPs. Wire is not mentioned, as he told Roach Smith, "Are you aware that there will be a public meeting to form an Essex Archaeological Association and after a feed of seven shillings and sixpence including a pint of wine? The meeting I may attend, but the dinner is beyond my reach. In the formation of this society I have been kept quite in the dark, because I am not rich enough to join the aristocrats."<sup>42</sup>

One area in which Wire considered himself most vulnerable was his lack of education, most particularly in the classics. He refers repeatedly to his anger that he was ridiculed for his supposed failings. Although it is clear from his journal and letters that Wire was a prickly individual, who was quick to take offence at any supposed slight, it is probable that his lack of a formal classical education was used as an excuse to exclude him. Most of his detractors will have had at least some acquaintance with the classics, as they formed an important part of the curriculum in schools of the period.<sup>43</sup> Wire never makes the references to the classical texts that were so conspicuous in most contemporary archaeological reports. He stressed

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<sup>41</sup> E.A.S. Minutes, 1<sup>st</sup>, September 1852. Disney, a wealthy local barrister, had inherited his father's classical antiquities formed in Italy in the previous century. He had added artefacts from Pompeii and written a catalogue, 'Museum Disneianum' (1846-1849). Disney founded the chair of archaeology at Cambridge in 1851 and bequeathed his collection to the university.

<sup>42</sup> This is cited in Rudsdale (1946) in which he says that it is taken from a letter from Wire to Roach Smith, dated 8<sup>th</sup>, December 1852. It is not clear where Rudsdale found this letter, as it does not appear in the Wire letter book in the E.R.O. in which the last letter is dated April 1852. The R.O. has several files of papers in the Wire collection recorded as missing. The Wire papers have been scattered between the E.R.O. and the Museum Service with the result that neither appears to know what is where!

<sup>43</sup> In 1839 Wire's son was the only non fee-paying pupil in the local grammar school. Wire wrote to the Bishop of London, the official controller of the curriculum, to complain about the limited range of subjects taught in the school. His letter was one indication of the campaign by the Liberals and the commercial interests in the town for a wider curriculum. In 1850, history, geography and more maths were added. (E.S. 10<sup>th</sup>, November 1843; 10<sup>th</sup>, April 1845 and 21<sup>st</sup>, June 1850.) Cited in Brown (1980) pp.64-65.



that his opinions had been formed “from the study, experience and reflection of twenty years, although they may seem contrary to the opinion of a B.A. or M.A.”<sup>44</sup>

In 1854 the Essex Archaeological Society and the Colchester Corporation started to discuss the amalgamation of the town museum with that of the Association. Wire was keen to be the curator in the extended museum and wrote letters and lobbied all the leading figures in the town, but he was unsuccessful. “When it was known I was a candidate for the situation, some parties who have influence set another person in front... Had I been a conservative, no objection would have been made, but having advanced liberal principles and not being inclined to abandon them now, is the chief obstacle in the way of my election.”<sup>45</sup> The final irony in Wire’s position appears in the last minutes of the Colchester Archaeological Society, when thanks were given to Rev. Jenkins for “his kindness in having formed the Association.”<sup>46</sup> Wire had officially been written out of the historical record.

Wire’s disappointment and frustration led him to withdraw from the archaeological activity in the town. He started to sell off his collection and even suggested to Roach Smith that he might start a small printing press, “in order to publish his views to the world.”<sup>47</sup> In another letter he says a guide to the town would not be a bad speculation, but, “I have the material, but not the ability to put them into a nice readable shape.”<sup>48</sup> He told the Yorkshire antiquarian, H.E. Smith, that, “my love for antiquarian pursuits have abated in great measure because of the coldness shown to me by those who at one time proffered the greatest respect, because my circumstances will not allow me to feed them well.”<sup>49</sup> Wire had been forced to give up his business because of debt and failing health, which he attributed to stress caused by the unkindness of his fellow antiquarians. In the last letter in his letter book in April 1852, he claimed that he had given up a good trade to rescue the

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<sup>44</sup> Letter to Roach Smith, 3<sup>rd</sup>, June 1851.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Roach Smith, 8<sup>th</sup>, July 1851.

<sup>46</sup> C.A.S. Minutes, 11, May 1852.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to Roach Smith, 7<sup>th</sup>, July 1851.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Frederick Fairholt, 18<sup>th</sup>, July 1851. These guides had proliferated due to the expanding tourist trade made possible by the railways. Fairholt was an illustrator and engraver who was responsible for many of the illustrations in contemporary archaeological books and articles. He was a close friend of Roach Smith.

<sup>49</sup> Letter to H.E. Smith, 20<sup>th</sup>, February 1852.

town from oblivion. The final words on his archaeological importance can be left to his friend Roach Smith. "He had great perseverance and intelligence, but failed to find favour with the leading towns people and in consequence, masses of choice antiquarian material was lost to science."<sup>50</sup> William Wire died in 1857 after catching a cold in his new job as a postman.

### *A Museum for Colchester*

The need for a place of safe keeping for the archaeological finds was becoming increasingly pressing. Apart from the private collections of individual residents, the only other museum in the town had been set up as a part of the Colchester Philosophical Society in 1820. The contents were the usual eclectic mixture to be found in museums of the period. In addition to shells, fossils, rock and mineral samples, there were numerous Roman artefacts, including coins, earthenware vessels, tiles and a piece of Roman tessellated pavement. The building suffered fire damage in 1835 when many of the contents were lost. In 1846, the Colchester Corporation designated one room in the Town Hall to be used as a town museum.<sup>51</sup> It was this room which was seen by the B.A.A. visitors. The Museum Contributions Book, in which all donations were recorded, shows that for the first four years there was a steady flow of gifts, including grave goods found in Mr. Taylor's garden in 1848. But there are no entries after 1850. The decline in the Town Hall Museum appears to have started at the same time as Charles Round, an Essex Archaeological Society member, offered the society a room in the castle for use as a museum. But the Society minutes do not make it clear how the decision to merge the two collections was made. It is possible that a Tory-dominated local authority felt that the provision of a museum was more appropriately provided by a private body. Between 1852 and 1860, the minutes make frequent references to meetings between representatives of the Corporation and the Society to discuss finance, the curator, and respective rights of ownership. It was in this museum that Wire aspired to be the curator. But Wire was already dead by the time the museum finally opened to the public on September 27, 1860.

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<sup>50</sup> Smith (1886) p.36.



The decision to move the museum from the Town Hall to the castle can be seen as significant in several ways. In the first place, the contents brought together the collection owned by the public representatives, in the form of the Corporation, and the collection owned by private citizens, in the guise of the Essex Archaeological Society. As such it was an example of the public and private interests coming together to express local pride in Colchester's role in British national history. The joint ownership of the museum emphasised that this great past belonged to both the town and its private citizens. The fact that it was finally realised as a public museum in the private arena at the castle, rather than in the public space at the Town Hall, emphasises the importance of private activity in most contemporary archaeological spheres.

### Controversies

The nature of the evidence for Colchester's past presented problems to the antiquarians. On the one hand, the textual accounts gave vivid descriptions of two events, the invasion and the revolt, which allowed and indeed encouraged the antiquarians to use their imagination in order to fill in the gaps between these ancient fragments. On the other hand, the continual reuse of old building materials rendered the physical remains confusing and ambiguous and had led to conflicting theories and heated debate.

The actual location of the original town continued to be debated. Camden's assertion that the site of Camulodunum was at Maldon and not Colchester had led to confusion. Unsurprisingly, most of the local antiquarians believed that their town was the site of the ancient city. For instance, Thomas Cromwell, in 1825, was convinced that such were the ruins at Colchester that, "on them alone might rest its claim to be considered the Camulodunum of Latin authors."<sup>52</sup> Roach Smith was of the same opinion but gave a more reasoned justification for his views. "We have Colonia in the fifth Itinerary of Antonius at fifty two Roman miles from London. Colchester is, I believe fifty-one. Gruter gives an inscription of a person

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<sup>51</sup> The 1844 Museum Act allowed local authorities to spend a halfpenny rate on local museums. Wire remarked that Rev. Round had refused to join discussions about a town museum because "he thinks it will detract from his attempts to build a new church." (W.W.J. 18<sup>th</sup>, December 1844).

<sup>52</sup> Cromwell (1825) p.41

styled assessor of the Roman citizens of Colonia Victriconius in Britain at Camulodunum.”<sup>53</sup> But as the Rev. Jenkins pointed out, the dispute had been revived as recently as 1853 in Dr. Smith’s Dictionary of Classical Geography, in which this popular authority claimed that Camden had been correct.<sup>54</sup>

An associated debate arose over the question of whether the Roman town had been built on the same site as the capital of the defeated British tribe, as claimed by Suetonius and Dio Cassius, or about three miles away. Dr. Duncan maintained that the abundance of coins inscribed with images of their king, Cunobelin, which had been found around the remains, confirmed Colchester as the site of the capital.<sup>55</sup> Wire was unconvinced and felt the subject was obscure. “I am aware that realised wisdom is against me, but I cannot conceive of a place to have been the chief town and residence of royalty and to have left no vestiges of its former occupancy.”<sup>56</sup> He even disputed Duncan’s claims that many British coins had been found. “That is not a fact, as after thirty years experience in visiting excavations made for drainage and other purposes, what coins of Cunobeline have been found (and they are very rare) are either on the level of Roman remains or associated with them.”<sup>57</sup>

But the most contentious issue was the origin of the castle. The building stands in the centre of the town. It looks like a large Norman keep but is clearly constructed with Roman bricks and tiles. By the 1840s there had been many changes to the original structure, including a shallow style roof and a rather Byzantine shaped tower. It had also completely lost one floor. The Colchester Chronicle states that in 1076 William the Conqueror granted Colchester to a Norman baron, Eudo Dapifer, who, “Built the castle on the foundation of the palace of Coel, once

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<sup>53</sup> Letter to Wire, 8<sup>th</sup>, December 1852.

<sup>54</sup> Jenkins (1853) p.5

<sup>55</sup> Duncan (1858) p.26

<sup>56</sup> Letters to Roach Smith, 1<sup>st</sup>, December 1851 and 30<sup>th</sup>, December 1851. The latter contains Wire’s only classical reference. “Just look at Tacitus Book 12, section 31 and Book 14, section 31 and see if there is not room to doubt the existence of the colony having been planted in this part of the country.”

<sup>57</sup> W.W.J. 1<sup>st</sup>, September 1855. Previously Wire had described Duncan as “a young hand who only started with antiquities five months ago.” (Letter to Roach Smith, 10<sup>th</sup>, November 1851) The antiquarians seem to have been envisioning an urban settlement with all the buildings suggested by that term. Modern archaeologists think that Camulodunum consisted of several small sites spread over an area of ten square miles linked together by a series of defensive dykes. The name Camulodunum was the Roman version of fortified place (dunum) of Camulos, the Celtic god of war. The original Roman fort was built within the enclosure and the Roman site spread westwards from the fort. See Crummy (1997) p.34-35



king.”<sup>58</sup> This indicates that the site had always been identified with an important building. For the next five hundred years it was used as a prison, and as a garrison during the Civil War. By 1683, the castle stood empty and was bought by a local builder for use as building materials. He had already dismantled the top floor before he went bankrupt. It then stood empty until a wealthy local man, Charles Gray, bought it and added it to the grounds of his elegant eighteenth century house where it featured as a romantic ruin in the landscape. It was Gray who had the new roof and tower added in 1760, in the belief that they enhanced its Roman appearance.

To the antiquarians, two aspects of the castle building were obvious. One was its position, which had obviously been chosen to dominate the town, and the second was that it contained Roman building materials. The major issue for dispute was who had built it? The most popular view was that it had been the site of a major Roman building that was still largely intact when the Normans arrived in 1066. Like the Romans before them, the Normans wanted a building which would emphasise their power and authority to the conquered local population. They had therefore dismantled the Roman edifice and used the materials to construct a large keep on the same site. According to this popular version, the castle was Norman, although built with Roman materials. The other view was that the original Roman temple had been reconstructed after the revolt in 61 C.E., and that the Normans had merely re-modelled the existing building and converted into a fortress. According to this point of view, the castle was the Temple of Claudius with Norman modifications.

Rev. Cutts, the secretary of the Essex Archaeological Society, was the main advocate for the Norman castle theory. He was supported by most of the rest of the Society, Roach Smith and William Wire. But Rev. Jenkins continued to believe that the castle was Roman. Limited excavations were carried out in an attempt to discover more about the foundations of the castle, but they proved inconclusive. In 1850, Wire wrote, “Rev. Jenkins is at war to prove that the castle stands on the same site as the Temple of Claudius”. And in 1851, “there will be some of the

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<sup>58</sup> Colchester Chronicle in Crummy (1997) p.144. According to Crummy, “the identification of the temple as the palace of Coel should not put us off since this could have been what the Norman builders believed.”



most out of the way and absurd opinions that ever emanated from any man suspecting the antiquity of a place.”<sup>59</sup> The ‘war’ was carried on through publications. In 1852 Jenkins produced Colchester Castle built as a Temple of Claudius Caesar, to which Cutts replied with Colchester Castle not a Roman Temple in 1853.<sup>60</sup> The author of an 1855 review of the two publications in the Quarterly Review, described Jenkins as, “A man of genius... But when his enthusiasm leads him on to declare that the castle of Colchester is nothing less than the actual temple of Claudius with certain transmutations, which the British took, but failed from its vastness and solidity to destroy; we can no more accept his ingenious and eloquent arguments than the vague surmise of General Roy.”<sup>61</sup> However, in spite of this conclusion, the author was aware that Colchester remained a, “centre round which the legends and traditions of the island were grouped.”<sup>62</sup>

### Sense of Place

As the Quarterly Review article had pointed out, Colchester had continued to provide a rich source of associations and stories through which contemporary commentators could both visualise the past, and their own identity in relation to that past. Many antiquarians relished that part of their work that enabled them to feel closer to the past and to bring it to life. If it also enhanced the importance of their locality, so much the better. Colchester’s past offered a particularly rich source of such stories. There is the British king Cunobelin, whose ancestor Cassivellaunus was defeated by Julius Caesar. The belief that Colchester had been the site of a tribal capital before the Roman occupation had led antiquarians to

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<sup>59</sup> Letters to Roach Smith, 6<sup>th</sup>, September 1850 and 15<sup>th</sup>, February 1851.

<sup>60</sup> Jenkins’ reply to Cutts had a postscript. “It remains for me to inform the dictator that fragments of Roman stucco-i.e., of lime mixed with pounded tile, still adhere to the walls of the first story of Colchester Castle; and if he will stoop from his assumed pre-eminence to explain to men of common sense how the Romans could possibly build walls on which the Romans laid the stucco, he will then be the most extraordinary, as he is indisputably the least civil, of architects and archaeologists in the present year A.D. 1853.” (Jenkins (1853) p.47)

<sup>61</sup> Q.R. Vol.193 (1855) pp.89 & 98. The article is unsigned, but Wire thought the author was the historian Charles Merivale, author of A History of the Romans under the Empire (1850-64). See Turner (1993) p.249. Modern archaeologists believe that the castle was built around and over the podium of the Temple to Claudius. The size of the keep, the largest Norman keep in the country, was totally dictated by the Roman foundations. This was not finally proved until Mortimer Wheeler’s excavation in 1920. (Crummy (1997) pp.142-148).

<sup>62</sup> Q.R. Vol.193 (1855) p.98.



speculate that the tribe concerned was that of Cunobelin and Cassivellaunus. Cunobelin achieved further prominence as Cymbeline in Shakespeare's play. In his article about the town walls, Duncan quoted lines from the play and claimed, "Cunobelin, the Cymbeline (sic) of the heroic British traditions, does not exist in the verse of the bard alone... his coinage in pure gold and in bronze, (is) so familiar to the collectors at Colchester."<sup>63</sup> Another popular character was Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great. According to the medieval Colchester Chronicle, Helena was the daughter of a local king, born in Colchester. She is supposed to have married the Roman general, Constantius, in order to persuade him to lift his siege of the town. After the birth of their son in Colchester, she is reputed to have founded the St. Helen's chapel. Her association with the town is underlined by her portrait on the Colchester Borough charter of 1413 and her statue on the top of the 1899 town hall.<sup>64</sup> What is important is not the truth or otherwise of the stories, but their availability to be used in emphasising the importance of the town in national history. In Colchester, this had actually been the case during the revolt and the firing of the temple, when, in Duncan's words, Boudica, "stands forth on the stage of history".<sup>65</sup>

Boudica (or Boadicea as she was called by the Victorians) has been an important symbolic figure in national British history, literature and art for many centuries. But she was a particularly potent figure in the history of Colchester because of the descriptions given of her and her troops' sacking of the town during the 61 C.E. revolt against Roman rule. In 1748, Morant described her as a, "brave virago, who when provoked by the brutish and unnatural usage of the Romans, made a vigorous attempt to shake off their galling yoke."<sup>66</sup> In contrast, Cromwell in 1825 described her troops as, "putting to the sword, burning, hanging, crucifying and by every other method destroying every Roman who fell into their hands."<sup>67</sup> These two

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<sup>63</sup> Duncan (1858) p.26. He quotes Cymbeline, Act III, scene v.

<sup>64</sup> Cromwell (1825) acknowledges that neither Camden nor Gibbon believed in Helen's connection with Colchester, but he still concludes; "notwithstanding these learned opinions, we really conceive the balance of argument to be in favour of the truth and consistency of the facts cited in our chronicle." (p.41).

<sup>65</sup> Duncan (1858) p.28.

<sup>66</sup> Morant (1748) p.13.

<sup>67</sup> Cromwell (1825) p.30.

views are further evidence of the local antiquarians' reliance on the classical texts, where they are available. Morant used the description in Tacitus and Cromwell used the much harsher description in Dio Cassius.<sup>68</sup> The two texts provided the raw material for different interpretations of the British queen and the revolt and therefore later historians could make use of the version that best suited their interpretation of the past. I discuss these issues further in Chapter 7.

Colchester's ability to bring the past to life seems to have been a potent force. I have already referred to several writers who commented on the strong associations aroused by the fertile mixture of vivid text and suggestive architecture. This resonance is evident in Duncan's article about a plot of land close to the Roman wall, which he described as, "The quietest corner in old Colchester, replete with antiquarian interest... and alive with the memories of the past."<sup>69</sup> He describes the succession of different inhabitants from, "Celtic barbarism, then of the golden reign of Cunobelin, [to] part of the grounds of wealthy Roman proprietors."<sup>70</sup> He continues, "It does not require much fancy, to conjure up the villa, and its gardens, and its cool baths."<sup>71</sup> In the Middle Ages it was the site of a Friary, which was abolished during the dissolution of the monasteries and in the eighteenth century it was used as a botanical garden. But, "The quiet nook, loved by Celt, Roman and solitary friar... now belongs to a freehold building society, redolent of shares and £10 voters; the quietest part of the quiet corner being used as a burial place for

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<sup>68</sup> See Tacitus Annals Book XIV, Chapter XXX p.159 and Dio Cassius Epitome LXII, 1-2, 3-6, 7-12.

<sup>69</sup> Trans. E.A.S. Vol.I (1858) p.210.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.212

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.212.



Quakers.”<sup>72</sup> This small area seemed to demonstrate the continuity with the past, each period leaving characteristic remains by which they could be identified.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.215.

## **CHAPTER 6: CHESTER**

On the March 16, 1849, a meeting was held at the Rectory of St. Mary on the Hill, Chester, in order to form a society for the study of the history, archaeology and architecture of the area.<sup>1</sup> In the same year, the delegates to the annual conference of the British Archaeological Association were told that Chester “afforded rich and plentiful remains of antiquity.”<sup>2</sup> The numerous nineteenth century guides, which I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, all stress the city’s importance as a fortress and administrative centre during the Roman occupation. The visitor might assume from these descriptions that they would be able to see significant Roman remains. But, as in most of Britain, evidence of Chester’s Roman occupation had largely disappeared. What made Chester different and unique in Britain was that, rather than being destroyed, old buildings had been adapted and reused. The effect had been to draw attention to their antiquity, while at the same time confusing their origins, thus rendering their age and period problematic.

It certainly made the task of locating Roman Chester more difficult for the antiquarians. In an article about Chester’s Roman remains, Roach Smith remarked on the difficulty of detecting “the original Roman work among the anomalous and perplexing styles of different periods, by which it was surrounded and embedded.”<sup>3</sup> He was referring to the walls, but his comment could as easily be applied to most aspects of the town’s Roman past. When the American, Nathaniel Hawthorne, visited the city in 1853, he remarked on the same paradox. “It is all very strange, very quaint, very curious to see how the town has overflowed its barriers, and how, like many institutions here, the ancient wall still exists, but is turned to quite another purpose than what it was made for, so far as it serves any purpose at all.”<sup>4</sup> A tourist guide in 1856 also commented on the mixed messages presented by the city’s buildings. “What is this Elizabethan building? Surely this has no tale to tell, no musty connections with mediaeval times. No truly: here we have a creation of

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<sup>1</sup> Its full name was the Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society. I will refer to it as C.A.A.H.S.

<sup>2</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.V (1849) p.232.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.212.

<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne (1884) p.453. Diary entry 1st October, 1853



the modern age.”<sup>5</sup> There is an irony at the heart of ‘ancient’ Chester, that in fact much of it is a Victorian city.

### Tracing the Past

The evidence of Chester’s Roman past was scattered and consisted of a range of small clues, which had to be drawn together to recreate a coherent picture. The classical texts, old antiquarian reports, foundations of buildings and artefacts and even the geology of the site all contributed to the final picture. The controversies and differing interpretations that resulted are indicative of just how difficult it was to trace the town’s Roman past. The complexity of the evidence means that it is sometimes difficult for a present-day historian to understand the nineteenth century antiquarians’ interpretation of their Roman history.

All the commentators were agreed that the modern city was built upon the site of the Roman legionary fortress of Deva. The classical accounts of the Roman army’s activities in North Wales and Cheshire were the basis for this belief. In the Annals, Tacitus describes the campaigns of Ostorius Scapula and of Suetonius Paulinus, who fought the British on the island of Mona (Anglesey).<sup>6</sup> And in the Agricola, Tacitus describes the eventual conquest of Mona before Agricola went into winter quarters, from which, in the next year, 79 C.E. he proceeded to march north into modern Lancashire.<sup>7</sup> The historians assumed that these campaigns were based in the legionary fortress of Deva. In his geography, written in 140 C.E. Ptolemy refers to the site of Deva as the headquarters of the 20th Legion, as does the Antonine Itinerary written a few years later. According to Dio Cassius, when Severus divided the island into two parts in 197 C.E., both the second and the twentieth legions were stationed in Upper Britain.<sup>8</sup> But between the death of Severus in 211 C.E. and the final departure of the Roman forces in the fifth century, there are no further references to Deva. The only clue is offered by the lists of military and civil dignitaries in the Notitia Dignitatum, compiled in 408

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes (1856) p.103.

<sup>6</sup> Tacitus, Annals, Book 14, Chapter 29 pp.155 & 157

<sup>7</sup> Tacitus, Agricola, Chapter 18, p.61.

<sup>8</sup> Dio Cassius, Book 4, Chapter 23. In Upper Britain the Twentieth Legion was at Chester and the second legion was at Caerleon.

C.E., where no mention is made of the twentieth legion, which had presumably already left Britain.

An example of the way in which an early nineteenth century historian viewed the classical texts as evidence is to be found in Joseph Hemingway's History of the City of Chester (1831). He refers to the lack of information prior to the invasion, which had led to "vague conjecture and curious speculation." But for the Roman period itself, "the lights of history are as clear and distinct as they are numerous and authentic."<sup>9</sup> He quotes Caesar, Tacitus, Pliny and Ptolemy for general information and Dio, Ptolemy and the Antonine Itinerary as sources for his belief that Chester was the headquarters of the twentieth legion. However, despite these references to the light thrown by the classical texts, he says that the last three were "very defective" as they "don't count non-Roman soldiers".

The seventeenth and eighteenth century accounts of the Roman remains presented a confusing picture, as can be seen in the various descriptions of the city gates. The old Medieval Northgate had been pulled down and replaced by another in the neo-classical style designed by Thomas Harrison, "the architect of the castle, who spent much of his early life in Rome." He stated that when he pulled down the old gate to make room for the new one, he found the old substructure to be Roman.<sup>10</sup> The history of the Eastgate, which had been pulled down in 1768, was more problematic as there were a number of varying descriptions and sketches made before its demolition. When Stukeley visited Chester in 1725, he wrote, "I observed immediately two arches of Roman work. I was overjoyed at the site of so noble an antiquity."<sup>11</sup> However, his illustration shows three arches rather than two. Pennant, writing shortly after the gate's demolition wrote, "On taking down the modern case of Norman masonry, the Roman appeared in full view. It consisted of

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<sup>9</sup> Hemingway (1831) pp.2 & 11.

<sup>10</sup> Hemingway (1831) p.362. Thomas Harrison studied architecture in Rome. He designed a house for Lord Elgin and when Elgin was appointed ambassador to the Porte, Harrison urged him to procure casts of all the remaining sculptures in Athens. He designed several buildings in the neo-classical style in Chester. A guide described the new bridge as "unequalled in many points by any which Greece or Rome had built." (Hughes (1856) p.76).

<sup>11</sup> Stukeley (1727) p.31. Cited in Watkin (1886) p.339.



two arches formed of vast stones.”<sup>12</sup> Again, both the sketch illustrating Pennant’s description and the one which accompanied another description by Broster, which he claimed to have done while it was still standing, diverge from the written descriptions. Roach Smith merely drew attention to the discrepancies, but concentrated on the figure which, it had been claimed, had stood on the pillar between the two arches. He thought the drawings showed more resemblance to work of the sixteenth or seventeenth century “than Roman; but the original drawing may have been inaccurate.”<sup>13</sup>

In the light of these differing accounts, it is not surprising that Hemingway preferred to rely on the evidence of material remains in Chester. “The shape is that of a Roman fort and her advanced architectural science is clear from the walls and arches. The remains of her ancient ramparts is distinctly visible in our present castle and we recognise her Praetorium where St. Peters church now stands.”<sup>14</sup> The numerous tiles and bricks embossed with the legionary symbols of the boar and initials VV (Valeria Victrix) had lent weight to the antiquarians’ conviction that Chester was the site of Roman Deva. The discovery of Roman artefacts and remains of Roman buildings had given some depth and a sense of reality to a Roman past which appeared to have been smothered by later development.

In 1849, Roach Smith wrote an article about the Chester remains. He described the walls with their series of gates, which completely enclosed the city; a figure of the goddess Minerva in a shrine<sup>15</sup>; the remains of a hypocaust; various altars with inscriptions; inscribed tiles, stones and pigs of lead; some sepulchral urns and a variety of other small objects. In fact, with the exception of the walls, there was a typical selection of remains that were to be anticipated from most sites with a

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<sup>12</sup> Pennant (1810) pp.150-151. Cited in Watkin (1886) p.107. Hemingway attempted to clarify the confusion by using comparisons with Roman examples. “This species of double gate was not infrequent. The *Porte Erquilina* and *Porte Portesi* at Rome were of this kind.” (Hemingway (1831) p.339).

<sup>13</sup> *B.A.A.J.* Vol.V (1849) p.215. Roach Smith had discussed the unreliability of illustrations as evidence when he examined a Roman sepulchral monument found by Christopher Wren in London. “In Gale and Handen the figure is represented with short hair and a short sword held across the body; while in Horsley and Pennant it is represented with long hair in ringlets hanging over the shoulders like a judge’s wig and a great sword like a Highland claymore.” (Roach Smith (1848) p.127). In other words, illustrations are unreliable as they tend to follow contemporary styles and fashions.

<sup>14</sup> Hemingway (1831) p.26.

<sup>15</sup> Roach Smith attributed the preservation of the figure to “early Christians adopting the image as a statue of the Virgin.” (Roach Smith (1868) p.30).



Roman past. But, unlike most former Roman sites in Britain where new development had obliterated the Roman remains, in Chester, the city's strategic importance as a base for campaigns into Wales had ensured that the Roman walls had been used and extended by later builders.<sup>16</sup> It was, in effect, a frontier town on the boundary with hostile territory.

Another factor adding to the confusion was the building materials. Chester stands on red sandstone rock and this characteristic stone was used by the Romans in the construction of the walls, as well as by later builders of the cathedral and the churches. The result is that there are no examples of Roman brick and tiles being re-used later as building material, as can be seen in other towns built on Roman sites such as Colchester. Roach Smith refers to the uniformity in style and arrangement commonly found in Roman buildings throughout the Roman Empire and the confusion that arises when this familiar style is not found. "Here, the construction to which we alluded, has been deviated from so thoroughly, that it has been questioned whether any vestiges of the original Roman walls are yet extant."<sup>17</sup> If Roach Smith, the leading British archaeologist of his day, found Chester confusing, it is hardly surprising that others should do so as well.

It was the walls that excited the most controversy in Chester. Aethflaeda, the daughter of Alfred the Great, was believed to have extended them in the Saxon period. The first antiquarian to describe Chester's walls was Stukeley, in 1725, and he suggested that, "between Eastgate and the river, the Roman wall is pretty perfect for one hundred yards together."<sup>18</sup> Pennant disagreed and argued that, "no part of the old walls exist, but they stood, like the modern, on the soft freestone rock." A view echoed by Lysons a few years later.<sup>19</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, the local antiquarian, Rev. William Massie, conceded that the south and west walls had been extended, but he still believed that a large part of the north wall above the foundations was Roman. Roach Smith said that Massie thought that "particular

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<sup>16</sup> The walls in Chester and the castle in Colchester had presented similar problems because of the way the Roman buildings had been incorporated into a more recent building.

<sup>17</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.V (1849) p.211.

<sup>18</sup> Stukeley (1727) p.33. Cited in Watkin (1886) p.95.

<sup>19</sup> Pennant (1810) p.147. Cited in Watkin (1886) p.95. Lysons (1810) p.427.



parts which he had noticed varied so remarkably from the general construction, and at the same time harmonised so strikingly with each other, as to incline him to believe that he had detected the original Roman work among the anomalous and perplexing styles of different periods...”<sup>20</sup> When Thomas Hughes researched the 1771 construction of the Nantwich Canal, he found that “the line actually took the course of the ancient Roman fosse, excavated some 1,500 years before.”<sup>21</sup> The controversy was to rumble on and be the subject of conferences and books in the 1880s.<sup>22</sup>

Another subject for debate was the so-called ‘Roman Bath’ discovered in Bridge Street some time between 1720 and 1730. All the antiquarians who had visited the town mentioned it, including Horsley (1732), Pennant (1810) and Lysons (1806-1822). In fact it was the hypocaust for a large building. This became obvious when an adjoining site was demolished in 1863 enabling further excavation. In a report, local antiquarian Dr. Brushfield compared the findings with the recent excavations at Wroxeter and with Bath. “I am strongly of the opinion that they formed a portion of the Public Baths, that they joined the Basilica, and that both opened into the space on the North and West sides which formed the Forum of the Roman Deva.”<sup>23</sup> The London archaeologist, William Tite, disagreed. He thought the site was that of a temple, built about a century before the Romans left Britain. He based his opinion on the discovery of a series of column bases, “an arrangement which gives the appearance of a small temple... The whole of this part of the building might, therefore have constituted a four-columned Corinthian portico, about the size of the Maison Carree at Nimes.”<sup>24</sup> He also cited the remains at Bath and, using information from both sites, he drew a detailed plan of the, “probable state of the Roman Temple and baths at Chester, with a comparison of the columns

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<sup>20</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.V (1849) p.212

<sup>21</sup> Cheshire Sheaf, part 4, p.176. Cited in Watkin (1886) p.105.

<sup>22</sup> Restoration work carried out in the 1880s discovered Roman gravestones built into the fabric of the northern wall. This reawakened the debates about the wall’s origins. Some argued that the walls had been built late in the Roman occupation using earlier Roman material for stone, whilst others argued that it was a Mediaeval structure. The dispute is similar to arguments in Colchester about the castle’s origins.

<sup>23</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol.III. Cited in Watkin (1886) p.145

<sup>24</sup> A. Vol.XL (1863-1865) p.288.

and entablatures found in a similar structure at Bath.”<sup>25</sup> He claimed that, “there is but little which can be attributed to fancy. The screen of columns fronting the street is imaginary, but the foundation wall of it is really there. The appropriation of the apartments is also conjectural, but it is, nevertheless, reasonable and consistent with ancient authorities.” In spite of his protestations to the contrary, Tite’s opinion owed as much to the classical texts and his imagination as it did to the few fragmentary remains. Antiquarians’ knowledge of other sites, such as the Maison Carree and the monuments in Rome, moulded their expectations and fired their imaginations, with the result that their conclusions often tell us more about the antiquarians than they do of the remains.

Tite is at pains to stress that his motive for producing the plan of the Chester remains was the need for an accurate survey of the findings before they were hidden again beneath a new building. He says that although he knows such a plan should have been done by “a professional local antiquary”, he did not think this had happened. Tite seems to be unaware of the Chester Archaeological Society and this would suggest that the society was no longer very active. I will deal with the formation and progress of the society later but first I will outline the social context in which it was founded.

### *Social and Economic Chester*

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the town was a prosperous trading centre, using the Dee for the import and export of goods and to supply water for the production of cloth. In 1701, when Defoe visited the town, he deplored the darkness of the Rows<sup>26</sup>, but described the streets as “very broad and fair and run through the whole city in straight lines, crossing in the middle.” This would seem to indicate that the city streets still followed the basic outline laid down in the Roman fortress. Several characteristic black and white timbered buildings, such as Stanley Place and Bishop Lloyd’s House, were built during this prosperous period. Both of them were to be at the centre of conservation battles in which the Chester

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.290.

<sup>26</sup> Defoe, (Penguin ed. 1971) p.392. A modern guide describes the Rows as “Unique to the city. They are two tiers of shops, with galleries running above stone crypts or under crofts, reached by steps from the street.” (Jarrold Guide, 1995) p.16) In 1872 Henry James described them as a “architectural idiosyncrasy. They are a sort of Gothic edition of the blessed arcades and porticoes of Italy. (James, (1905.) ed. Edel, 1981, p.59.



Archaeological Society would play a part later in the century. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Dee had silted up and Stockport had become the industrial centre of the county, linked directly to the port of Liverpool by canals.<sup>27</sup>

There can be little doubt that the impact of these changes led to hardship in the town, particularly among working people. But there were those who saw the decline of manufacturing as a positive development. In 1831, Joseph Hemingway described the advantages of the town as an excellent situation, good air and “an absence of manufactories and the crowds of the lowest rabble they engender, render it a desirable residence for the higher classes and there are few places where the gentry form so great a proportion of the community as here.”<sup>28</sup> He describes the sort of people who were attracted to live in the town as, “junior branches of good families dependent on moderately competent incomes, retired military officers, resident clergy...” who, “enjoy all the advantages of polished society. A state of things which naturally induces numbers of similarly circumstanced to take up their domicile amongst us.”<sup>29</sup> He lists the city’s facilities as a theatre, an assembly room, music and choral societies and reading rooms and libraries which, “afford ample means for the indulgence of the lazy lounge and the gratification of the man of literary or scientific research.”<sup>30</sup> Hemingway considered the tradesmen and shopkeepers to be respectable, less flashy and less concerned to make a good impression than the tradesmen in Liverpool. His analysis finishes with the workers. “They are well instructed in lower branches of education, but there is much less taste in this class for reading and the requirements of useful knowledge, than among the weavers and other mechanics of Lancashire.”<sup>31</sup> He deplores the lack of libraries and facilities for the poor and says that in this respect Chester is “behind hand with most of the provincial towns of equal importance.” He suggests that the public-spirited should provide, “useful books at a cheap price and thus stop

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<sup>27</sup> Swift (1996)

<sup>28</sup> Hemingway, Vol.II (1831) p.341.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.341.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.344.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.346. Some modern research appears to support his views. See Secord, (1994) pp.269-315.

working people wandering about the city, where they contact habits of profligacy.”<sup>32</sup>

This is an interesting, if rather unsubtle, analysis of a provincial town in 1830. It suggests that Chester was more likely to attract a conservative middle class population precisely because it was seen as remote from the sort of industrial and social unrest occurring elsewhere. It is possible that the appearance of the city, with its ancient buildings and cathedral, suggested a continuity and stability that stood in stark contrast to the industrial centres across the Mersey. It also ignored the social problems that did exist such as slum housing and disease. Behind the main streets, courts were being sub-divided into housing for the poor which had been described as, “appalling slum courts which, in relative terms, was as bad as that in the region’s industrial towns.”<sup>33</sup> It is estimated that by the 1860s about 17 per cent of the population was living in such conditions which probably played a part in causing two major outbreaks of cholera in the town, in 1831-32 and in 1848-49.<sup>34</sup>

Chester’s economic prospects were dramatically improved by the arrival of the railway in 1840. The town became a centre for routes all over the country including London, Liverpool and North Wales. By 1856, there were 98 passenger trains a day passing through Chester, carrying an average of 3,500 people: more than 1¼-million a year. What had started out as a staging post to other destinations quickly became a tourist attraction in its own right in which the city’s ancient buildings played a significant part. The effect on the town was to halt the economic decline of the previous decades. The visitors stimulated trade in Chester’s shops and service industries and between 1840-1875 the number of businesses rose by 46 per cent. Browns, ‘The Harrods of the North’, was rebuilt in the black and white style, in 1858.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.347.

<sup>33</sup> Herson (1996) p.17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.29. In 1853 Hawthorne visited the courts which “smelt anciently and disagreeably.” A woman told him that “she had seen two or three coffins in a day during cholera times.” Hawthorne (1884) p.454, 1<sup>st</sup>, October 1853.



The tourist boom heightened awareness of the commercial advantages offered by the town's picturesque appearance and the realisation that it had to be protected. In a speech praising the restoration work done in the cathedral, Rev. Raikes pointed out the advantage of such work in attracting visitors.<sup>35</sup> Where the preservation and restoration of the city's ancient buildings proved impossible, new houses were built in the style of the old, as it was the overall effect of age that needed to be achieved, rather than purity of detail. When Henry James visited the city in 1872, he recognised that many elements of the ancient appearance were in fact modern and represented a sanitised version of the past, that its former inhabitants would hardly recognise. "These elaborate and ingenious repairs attest a highly informed consciousness of the pictorial value of the city. I indeed suspect that much of this revived innocence of having recovered a freshness that never can have been, of having been restored with usurious interest."<sup>36</sup> It is probable, although never overtly stated, that an increased awareness of the economic value of the city's ancient appearance, and the need to protect it, was a part of the motivation for the creation of the Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society, in 1849.

### *The Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*

It was the Rev. William Massie who invited "a few individuals representing clergy, laity and professional architects" to form an antiquarian society<sup>37</sup> {PlateX, p.260}. The group's objectives were included in the prospectus, sent to prospective members. They were: the improvement of architectural taste, science and construction; the illustration and preservation of the remains of antiquity and other objects of interest in the city; the recommending of design for the restoration, construction and improvement of building and other works; the collection of historic, archaeological and architectural information, documents, relics, books

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<sup>35</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. (1858) p.26.

<sup>36</sup> James (1905) pp.35-43. James visited Chester in 1872. It is difficult to know how many other visitors were aware of the created image of the ancient façade.

<sup>37</sup> Minute Book, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1849

etc.; and finally, the mutual suggestion and interchange of knowledge on these subjects.<sup>38</sup>

The prospectus lists the names of those who had agreed to be involved, and this gives some indication of the sort of membership the committee was hoping to attract. The Dean, the Chancellor, Rev. Raikes, and the Canon in residence, Rev. Eaton, represented the bishopric. There were also two vicars, Frederick Ford and William Massie. The lay members were Mr. Hicklin, editor of the Chester Courant newspaper and two architects, Mr. Penson and Mr. James Harrison. The Bishop of Chester and the Lord Lieutenant, the Duke of Westminster, had agreed to be Patrons. The prospectus stated that, "They will be a sufficient guarantee to you as to the character of the undertaking."<sup>39</sup> The most striking feature of this list is the number of clergymen, which is probably an indication of the pre-eminent position of the Cathedral and the Bishop within Chester's society.

The society was to be governed by a council, composed of equal numbers of clergy and laity and it was stipulated that the latter had to include working architects. There would be a regular series of meetings at which lectures would be given and it was proposed that these lectures would be published in a journal. It was envisaged that a library and a collection of artefacts, drawings and plans would be made available to members. This outline of the administration and anticipated activities is significantly more detailed than I have encountered in any other society in my research. It is a rather top-heavy organisation, which suggests that the intention was to include all the most prominent and important people in Chester society.

Four classes of membership were suggested: Full Members, who would pay a pound a year and be eligible to stand for the council; Associate Members, who would be unable to stand for the council or invite visitors, but who would otherwise be able to use all the society's facilities (for ten shillings a year); "a third class for persons of enquiring minds among our artisans, admission to the lectures

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<sup>38</sup> Prospectus published in the Courant newspaper, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1849

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



and exhibitions at one shilling per quarter;" and lastly ladies, who could join for five shillings, but could not stand for office.<sup>40</sup>

The minute book gives some membership details. In June 1849 there were 34 full members, two associate members, five ladies and one lone quarterly member. Among the new recruits were Mr. Potts (the chairman of the Corporation's Improvement Committee), Rev. Rigg (the principle of the training college), and Mr. Bayliss (who was the inspector of works for the town council).<sup>41</sup> By December 1852, there were 90 full members, 20 associate members, 21 ladies and eight quarterly members.<sup>42</sup>

Rev. William Massie was the secretary and moving force behind the society until his death in 1856. He was a member of the local gentry and was educated in the free grammar school until he was 16. He joined the Army and was sent to India, where he was impressed by the temples and other relics of ancient religion. After his return to Britain 1830 decided to join the church and went to Trinity College Dublin, where he got the prize for classics. Another leading figure in the society was Rev. Raikes. He had followed a more conventional path into the church, going to school at Eton, before Cambridge and then spending some time travelling in Greece.

The Society's journal reports and the minute book give an impression of a group of middle class men, most of whom knew each other through a variety of other roles they played in the town. The new society offered another arena in which they could meet and share common concerns. Social meetings and enjoyment played an important part in the group's success, as the journal explained. "Good will and social feeling have been promoted between parties who would otherwise rarely meet except on business."<sup>43</sup>

The annual outings were popular events and offered the chance to meet like-minded people in other societies. The Society entertained the Liverpool group on

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. 1<sup>st</sup> June 1849.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1852.

<sup>43</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol. I preface.

their annual outing to Chester in July 1850. And in 1853 groups from Warrington, Liverpool and Manchester joined the Chester Society for a visit to the museum in Warrington. The rest of the day was taken up with visits to local churches, the remains of a Roman road and the day ended with a 'conversazione' at the house of a local historian, a Mr. Marsh.<sup>44</sup> The decision to hold the committee meetings during the day effectively excluded working men from the ruling body. But despite this, the C.A.A.H.S. was unique among archaeological societies of the period, in their attempt to attract a working class or artisan membership via the quarterly fee. It could be argued that only a really confident body in a city where social and religious differences were relatively non-contentious, had the assurance to encourage membership among working men. I will discuss these social factors in greater detail in another chapter.

### Group Activities

As its name suggests, the members' interests were wide-ranging. This diversity was reflected in the subject matter of the lectures, which ranged from Roman artefacts through to the elected knights for the shire in the seventeenth century and from obsolete punishments to all aspects of architecture. The Mediaeval period and ecclesiastical architecture were of particular interest and there were field visits to draw plans and make sketches of local churches and to survey headstones in churchyards.<sup>45</sup> Massie was interested in the Roman period. He presented several papers on some waterlogged wood, which had been found buried in river silt at Birkenhead. He was convinced that the wood was part of a Roman bridge, constructed to allow troop movements across the estuary. "This log of oak may serve as a peg on which to hang a discussion about the ancient geography of this country."<sup>46</sup> His evidence included passages from Herodian and Dio Cassius about troop movements in Britain during the Roman occupation. He also referred to,

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<sup>44</sup> The museum was owned by the Warrington Natural History Society. According to the C.A.A.H.S.J. it contained "a rare collection of curiosities, illustrative of archaeology, geology, entomology, ornithology and all the other scientific ologies." (p.338) In 1855 a new museum building was opened largely due to the effort of William Beaumont, a wealthy solicitor and a leading member of the Chetham Society. Beaumont also belonged to the C.A.A.H.S. and gave lectures on local history to the society. This is a good illustration of the manner in which the interests of societies were emeshed and overlapped, with individuals operating in several arenas of activity at the same time.

<sup>45</sup> Minute Book 21<sup>st</sup>, December 1849 and 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1851.

<sup>46</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. p.55.



“the well known description of Caesar’s passage over the Rhine in which he had said that it would not be in accordance with the dignity and greatness of the Roman nation to have recourse to ferries.”<sup>47</sup> Massie felt that the Birkenhead bridge would have been exactly the same as the Rhine bridge only on a smaller scale. Finally he quoted General Roy’s Military Antiquities of the Romans in North Britain (1793) on the size timbers required to build a bridge and the sixteenth century account by Leland, in which it was suggested that the sea had flooded the area on which the bridge would have stood. The whole article is an interesting example of the way in which one small object could be used to build up a picture of the Roman past.

Examples of more substantial Roman remains in Italy were used to explain and illustrate the meagre British remains. For instance, a paper on Roman domestic architecture was illustrated with drawings of the house of Sallust at Pompeii. Similarly, Massie compared a number of tombstones and urns with more complete examples in the museum at Tivoli, and produced pictures to emphasise his point. It is possible that Massie was thinking of Pompeii and Tivoli when he used a Corinthian column, the bases of further columns and a silver coin of Trajan, discovered during building work, to infer the existence of “a city of no mean character.”<sup>48</sup> But this impression was at least partially based on comparisons with major Roman remains in Italy, rather than the evidence from Chester. It was almost as though Roman Chester was seen as an extension of Rome itself.

The Society carried out no excavations. The remains that were discovered were unearthed as a result of building activity, as in the case of another Roman hypocaust that came to light in 1852. Although described by some members as a ‘Roman bath’, Rev. Massie pointed out that it was more likely to be part of an extensive system of hot air flues to heat a building. Other discoveries led to arguments, for instance, an altar with a Greek inscription, found in 1850. The inscription referred to Hermogenes, a physician, who had erected it in thanks to the deities who had preserved him from trouble. Rev. Massie used pictures of altars from Pompeii and coins of Vespasian to throw more light on the find. He speculated that this Hermogenes could be the same man as the one described by

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.71.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.199.

Dio Cassius, as the physician to the Emperor Hadrian. But he concluded, "it would be building a large inference on somewhat bare evidence to conclude that this was the Hermogenes who set up the altar."<sup>49</sup> Rev. Raikes, however, was determined that the altar should demonstrate the importance of Chester in Roman Britain. He remarked that the use of Greek was relatively uncommon in Britain and that it was possible that the physician had been with Agricola during the conquest of North Wales. "The mere fact of his residence here and the use of the Greek language is sufficient to show that Chester must at that time, have been a place of some importance and advanced civilisation."<sup>50</sup> But Raikes did not want to draw too close a parallel, since Hermogenes was a pagan and therefore to be pitied because of "the blindness which led him to honour those ideal beings who deserved it not." Like antiquarians in other parts of Britain at the same time, the Chester Society was eager to emphasise the importance and prominence of their locality in the great events of the past, but there were some aspects of the classical world with which they did not wish to be identified.

More unusual was that, unlike many other societies, a museum was not a major objective. In July 1849, the society agreed to rent two rooms in the county court, but these were mainly to act as a meeting place and reading room.<sup>51</sup> By 1855, the meeting rooms had moved to the Chester library building and discussions began with the library about a joint appointment of a librarian and curator.<sup>52</sup> A librarian was appointed and glass display cases were fitted round the room. The contents consisted largely of objects donated to the society by the members, although a few things were bought such as a gold torque, found in a drain in 1852, and books for the society library.<sup>53</sup> But it was not until 1857 that the minutes actually use the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.200.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.361.

<sup>51</sup> Minute Book, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1849. The same note records that Mr. Catheral had offered the society the use of rooms over his bookshop and printing works and that his offer was declined. Would it be too fanciful to suggest that this could have been because the society did not want to be so closely associated with 'trade'.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 10<sup>th</sup> May 1855.

<sup>53</sup> The Accessions Book records the books. They included Vitruvius Britannicus (Colen Campbell), Smith's Dictionary of Antiquities, Pompeiana (Gell), Ancient Coins (Akerman), Collectanea Antiqua and Excavations at Lymne (Roach Smith), Delineations of Roman Antiquities (E.Lee) and miscellaneous papers by, amongst others, Thomas Wright and John Collingwood Bruce. They also subscribed to the national archaeological journals.



word 'museum' and many more years before the society finally had a proper museum building.<sup>54</sup>

The reasons for the Chester society's lack of interest in forming a museum collection are not obvious. The two local landed families, the Grosvenors and the Egertons, had both formed collections and therefore it is possible that a town museum was seen as unnecessary.<sup>55</sup> But more important, the emphasis on the preservation of the city's ancient building façade was undoubtedly the Society's main priority. The commercial value of the ancient appearance was not lost on those members who were also some of the town's leading businessmen. Finally, while some members saw the advantage of a museum to the tourist trade, no individual with the time, money and enthusiasm put themselves forward for the task of putting one together.<sup>56</sup>

### The Society and Architecture

A significant difference between the C.A.A.H.S. and other societies was in the importance attached to the study of architecture.<sup>57</sup> There were regular lectures on architectural topics. For instance, Mr. Penson talked about half-timbered houses and Mr. Ayrton about Norman architecture and there was a day outing to Crewe to look at the proposed restoration of the church by Gilbert Scott. But their chief pre-occupation was to influence the designs for new and restored buildings in the town

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<sup>54</sup> In 1865 three society members bought Stanley Place, an original black and white house in a poor state of repair, for seven hundred and fifty pounds. The intention was to restore the building and use it as a museum. The project failed to get off the ground before the society itself became moribund.

<sup>55</sup> The head of the Grosvenor family was the Duke of Westminster, whose country house, Eaton Hall was just outside Chester. According to Hughes' Stranger's Guide (1856) the collection included a golden torque. "An ornament worn around the neck of illustrious British warriors. Queen Boadicea and Llewellyn are both recorded to have been so decorated."

<sup>56</sup> Museums were regarded as likely tourist attractions, particularly when they contained large and attractive remains such as mosaics. Cirencester's museum had over four thousand visitors in the two years after its opening, many of them from other parts of the country and the British Museum attracted 37,260 visitors in one week when it displayed a mosaic from Athens. (See Cirencester chapter and the I.L.N. 6<sup>th</sup> January 1949)

<sup>57</sup> Some of the earliest societies had been formed to influence ecclesiastical architecture. For instance the Cambridge Camden Society, formed in 1838 with the express purpose of encouraging the restoration of Anglican churches to what its members considered to be its high point, the Gothic style. The question of ecclesiastical architecture had become involved in wider disputes surrounding the nature of high church worship. However after its formation in 1843, the B.A.A. had urged the necessity to protect all ancient monuments without preference for any one style or period. Church architecture continued to be of great interest to many antiquarians, but it ceased to be the only or main focus of their activity. (See Willis (1998) pp.93-103 and Piggott (1976) pp.178-183).

centre. In fact, reading the minutes it is clear that they were operating as a watchdog over council and private building plans, in much the same way as a civic society would do today. At a meeting in December 1851, the Corporation asked their opinion on the design of new gas lamps, to which Mr. Ayrton remarked that they were “like a gallows placed there to scare away visitors.”<sup>58</sup> The architect, Mr. Penson, exhibited his plans for a new building to replace Platt’s chemist shop on Eastgate and was thanked for the “tasteful style, in keeping with the older properties around.”<sup>59</sup> And when Mr. Brown, a member of the Society, decided to rebuild and extend his shop on Eastgate in 1858, he showed his plans to the Society for their approval, which was duly given.<sup>60</sup> The Society was less happy about some other plans, and their concerns illustrate the continual battle to balance commercial interests and the preservation of the city’s ancient façade. “Unfortunately, it could not be expected that he (Mr. Gregory, the owner) would all together sacrifice his business views, but it was hoped that at least the carved timbers of the old house and, as far as possible, its external character, should be in some measure preserved.”<sup>61</sup> The society was involved in contemporary debates about church restoration. Members of the Liverpool Society were shown St. John’s Priory which, “called forth almost unbounded admiration, apart from the present style of pewing and wood work, which so sadly disfigures a building worthy of a different fate.” They were told that the Duke of Westminster was going to pay for remodelling the interior in order that it should harmonise with the rest of the building.<sup>62</sup>

However, while the society as a whole displayed a rather conservative, antiquarian interest in Chester’s ancient facade, several of its most prominent members were actively involved in the commercial and economic life of the city and had a financial investment in its development. Mr. Potts was developing industrial land

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<sup>58</sup> Minute Book 1<sup>st</sup> December 1851 and Journal p.204

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 1<sup>st</sup> December 1851 and 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1852. This is the building referred to by Thomas Hughes. Hughes wrote that the new building was “a most successful and elegant illustration of the manner which the antique character of our domestic architecture can be preserved, with every regard for modern requirements and comforts.” (pp.46-47)

<sup>60</sup> Minute Book 17<sup>th</sup> June 1858

<sup>61</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol.II 18<sup>th</sup> November 1861

<sup>62</sup> Minute Book 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1850.



in the Chester suburb of Saltney, on a possible Roman site, Charles Brown was creating a large department store on Eastgate, and the architects, Penson and Harrison, were designing new hotels to cater for the tourists attracted to the town by its picturesque appearance. The minutes and journal do not give any indication that these diverse activities were seen as representing possible conflict of interests. But none the less, there was an anomaly at the heart of the Society's attitude to the preservation of the old city. On the one hand, the members were anxious to protect the old buildings against the demands made by new development, but on the other, they were equally anxious that Chester should exploit the economic prosperity which success as a tourist attraction offered. So, there was a need for both old historic sights and all the advantages and conveniences of modern life - what Henry James was to call "antiquity with all mod. cons."<sup>63</sup> The challenge was to find a balance between these two, potentially conflicting, objectives, and the Society appears to have managed this reasonably successfully. It did help to preserve old buildings and played an important role in raising the Corporation's awareness of the need for new developments to be in sympathy with the old. But at the same time, the Society was aware of the part that the city's ancient remains could play in attracting tourists. It expressed regret that the town council had not chosen to establish a museum, as had been done in, "Manchester, Warrington and other places less prolific in local remains, which after all, bring more visitors and travellers to Chester, for the benefits of the city, than almost anything else."<sup>64</sup>

By the end of the 1850s the society appears to have gone into a decline. It could be that the diversion caused by architectural debates and concerns had meant that there was less energy available for archaeological pursuits. More likely, is that the deaths of Rev. Massie in 1856 and Rev. Raikes in 1857, left the Society without a leader.<sup>65</sup> Whatever the cause, there are several signs that the society had lost its vitality. As early as January 1852, the entries in the minute book become shorter

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<sup>63</sup> Cited by Dr. Chris Miele in a lecture on 'Conservation and the enemies of progress given at a conference in the London Guildhall University in September 1999 on The Idea of Heritage: Past, Present and Future.

<sup>64</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. p.452. The speaker regretted that the town council had not used the provision in 1845 Museum Act to raise money for such a purpose through the rates.

<sup>65</sup> Massie's obituary hinted at the difficulties he had faced. "Those only who know what a task it really is to hold together such a society, to provide the necessary matter for the monthly meetings, and to keep alive the sympathies of often lukewarm friends, can fully appreciate either the extent or the value of Mr. Massie's services." (C.A.A.H.S.J. p.401).

and were mainly concerned with the meeting room and library, and there were no more newspaper reports. It was also more difficult to find lecturers, as the report in the journal of a meeting in November 1853 illustrated. "The entertainment of the evening, though desultory and not possessed of much knowledge, was on the whole extremely agreeable; the table talk being after all, less formidable and more acceptable generally than the delivery of a dry and abstruse paper." The report continued, "Mere diversion is not the principal object of these meetings and solid information cannot always be dressed in the garb of amusement."<sup>66</sup> It appears that the society had become a successful part of the Chester social scene as the membership figures continued to rise to over 200 by 1863. But at the same time, the administration seems to have collapsed. No minutes appear in the minute book between December 1859 and December 1864 and no acquisitions were recorded between 1855 and 1883.<sup>67</sup> A description of a meeting in 1860 as 'large and fashionable' would suggest that the Society had been successful in its desire to recruit the town's leading citizens, but that the members' objectives in joining were not necessarily to inform themselves of matters archaeological and historical.<sup>68</sup>

### Tourism In Chester

One effect of the increased tourist trade was to stimulate the production of tourist guides to the town's main attractions. These guides provide another perspective of the way in which the people of the period visualised both the present and the past in Chester. The Community Library in the city holds a collection of these guides, from Broster's Guide (1782) to Thomas Hughes' Stranger's Guide (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1856). In themselves, these books provide a challenging jigsaw of attribution and relationship, which is almost as complicated as the challenges posed by the buildings they describe.

The town mayor wrote Broster's Guide in 1782. By the sixth edition, in 1822, it appeared as A Walk around the Walls and City of Chester by John Broster. Broster's Guide appears to have served as an example to the many others published

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.436

<sup>67</sup> It was during this low point that Tite visited the city and seemed unaware of any archaeological activity.

<sup>68</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol.II p.374. I will discuss this further in the social chapter below.



in the early years of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> When John Seacome published his Guide to Chester in 1836, he says in his preface that he had bought the copyright of Broster. If Broster was the exemplar for the early nineteenth century guides, then Joseph Hemingway's History of the City of Chester, (1831) was the main source for those guides written in the 1850s. A Chester Guide by Hugh Roberts (1851) and Pritchard's guide of the same name, published in 1852, are remarkably similar and they both follow Hemingway's words closely. This proliferation of guides, published by local booksellers, often in competition with one another, was characteristic of the period. A common feature and no doubt related to the competition between the publications, was the authors' disparagement of all the other guides. Thus, Hemingway in Panorama of the City of Chester (1836) refers to "numerous small publications which have been issued from the Chester Press" and describes them as "bagatelles."<sup>70</sup> However, Hemingway realised there was a need for more popular accounts of Chester's past, since much of the information was either "inaccessible or very expensive" and the original documents were, "concealed in the barbarism of an obsolete tongue."<sup>71</sup> Other potential new customers were the railway passengers and several guides were produced specifically for their use.<sup>72</sup>

The guides all follow a similar format: a brief outline of Chester's history; followed by a guided walk around the town to visit the main attractions; the walls, the Rows; and the Cathedral. They all attribute its foundation to the Roman occupation and emphasise its importance as a Roman centre. Hughes manages this very effectively by contrasting the Celtic settlement with the Roman city that succeeded it. "The rude huts of the Britons, the temples and altars of the ancient Druid, the mud walls and other defences, all vanished like a dream, while in their place arose the proud Praetorium, the pagan temples, the stately columns, the

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<sup>69</sup> For instance, A Stranger's Companion in Chester by Bateman (undated); A Stranger in Chester by Fletcher (1816) and another with the same title and also in 1816 by James Hansell.

<sup>70</sup> Hemingway (1836) preface.

<sup>71</sup> Hemingway (1831) preface. This was presumably what prompted him to write Panorama of the City of Chester: intended as a pocket dictionary to the inquisitive traveller and curious tourist (1836)

<sup>72</sup> Examples are The Railway Companion from Chester to Holyhead by Edward Parry (1848) and the same author's The Railway Companion from Chester to Shrewsbury (1849). There were also foreign visitors to be catered for and Thomas Pullin; a member of the C.A.A.H.S produced a French/English guide in 1851.

peerless masonry, the noble statues, the massive walls and all the other elements of civilisation which usually followed in the wake of grand old Rome.”<sup>73</sup> The image he evokes is as unrelated to the fragmented Roman remains in contemporary Chester as was the antiquarians’ image discussed earlier. But like the antiquarians, Hughes calls upon all the rhetoric associated with ‘grand old Rome’ to suggest Roman Chester. The two could almost be synonymous.<sup>74</sup>

Hughes’ description of the city in 1856 is, in some ways, the most interesting because of the way he contrasts the old city and the changes brought about by modern developments. He is no cultural Luddite, mourning the loss of the past. Instead, he relishes the signs of change and modern development. For instance, in this description of the railway, “The Roman walls that resisted so successfully the Roundhead batteries have in our own time succumbed to the engines of peace. The railway trains, with their living freight, now career merrily through two neighbouring apertures in these ancient fortification.”<sup>75</sup> Hughes believes that many of the changes had been beneficial. For instance, he praises the industrial development at Saltney and the new Diocesan training college, “a noble institution and a creation of the present age.” Above all, he points out the greater tolerance of the present as compared to the past when, “peace loving Quakers endured the rod of persecution for conscience sake. And yet, these were your oft vaunted days of civil and religious liberty.”<sup>76</sup>

The town’s antiquity and the continuity with the past symbolised by the walls, were like so much of Chester, deceptive, and guides like Hughes’ that emphasised the ‘Roman’ encouraged expectations not actually realised in the city’s physical appearance. Where visitors to Roman Chester might have expected to find grand buildings in the classical style, with pillars and sculptured entablatures, they found instead a town centre dominated by vernacular wood and plaster buildings, many in a very dilapidated condition. The boom in tourism had sharpened the city fathers’

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<sup>73</sup> Hughes (1856) p.4

<sup>74</sup> The clash of cultures suggested by this rhetoric was emphasised in the second edition of Robert’s guide by the use of illustrations of ‘native Britons’. I will discuss these in the chapter on national identity.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.26.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.99 and p.103.



awareness that preservation and restoration were necessary. When they did rebuild however, they did not seek to evoke the Roman past by the use of architecture based on classical rules, but instead, choose to reproduce the black and white buildings of the Tudor period. It is possible that the use of the classical style for many public buildings in the past had meant that the vernacular style was now regarded as more “truly old” than the classical. It certainly appeared more directly related to an English heritage than did the controlled marble buildings of classical Rome.<sup>77</sup> It is possible that the city fathers were more in tune with the historical imagination of the new tourists than they realised.

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<sup>77</sup> See Chandler (1971), Mordaunt Crook (1987) and Mandler (1997).

## **CHAPTER 7: NATIONAL IDENTITY**

The proliferation of archaeological and historical societies between 1840 and 1860 is just one example of the Victorian fascination with the past. In order to better understand its significance, it is necessary to look beneath the minutiae of historical detail and consider the purpose served by the study of the past at this particular time. Both Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson have argued that the heightened sense of nationality, evident throughout Western Europe in the nineteenth century, was a substitute for older social systems that had been eroded as a result of industrialisation and technological developments.<sup>1</sup> These changes had undermined many of the social and intellectual frames of reference through which individuals and groups defined themselves and organised their relationships with each other. Benedict Anderson argues that they were replaced by an “imagined community” of fellow members who were in practice unknown to each other, “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>2</sup> Unlike the systems they replaced, such as the Catholic Church, these communities were never universal or divinely ordained. Rather, they were “inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>3</sup> Within such communities, social traditions, that appeared to emphasise a supposed continuity with a real or imagined past, could be seen as attempts “to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant.”<sup>4</sup> Along with popular myths and legends, historians and antiquarians had an important part to play in the creation of these ‘imagined communities’ by providing evidence of historical continuity with an often idealised past. Their stories and the manner in which different groups were characterised, offered models by which individuals could recognise the place they and their kinfolk held in history.

There are no clear definitions of what was meant by the terms ‘British’ or ‘English’. Instead, the development of a concept of nationhood was a process. Fluctuating ideas involving different characteristics and appealing to different

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson (1983) Hobsbawm (1983) Introduction. Institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson p.15

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. See Marchand (1996) p.159

<sup>4</sup> Hobsbawm p.2



stories of origin reveal the extent to which a sense of nationality is a cultural construct, created in the present to meet contemporary needs. It follows that the meaning attached to a particular nationality will vary from individual to individual and from period to period. In particular it is important to draw a distinction between the feelings of 'ordinary' people that they belong to a certain group and the unconscious (or sometimes conscious) manipulation of those feelings practised by leaders and governments for nationalistic purposes.<sup>5</sup> As Hobsbawm points out, "nationality and national identification are dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below."<sup>6</sup> And within each of these two very broad groups there are further divisions and differing views.

In her influential study, Britons: the Forging of a Nation, Linda Colley has suggested that a British national identity took shape between 1707 and 1837 as a result of conflict with other groups who were perceived as different. She argues that the most important of these conflicts was war with France, although the Protestant religion and the development of the empire were also crucial elements in the process.<sup>7</sup> Confidence in the British nation became stronger as the slump, associated with the end of the war in 1815 and demobilisation, was replaced by a buoyant economy, a confidence highlighted by the Great Exhibition in 1851. Other scholars agree that a sense of national identity continued to develop throughout the Victorian period, but Hobsbawm points out that it evolved in different ways and at a different pace among the various groups and classes in British society.

Some of the difficulties presented by attempts to define national identities are to be found in a speech to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1855, in which the archaeologist and author, Thomas Wright, struggled to find a name for fourth century Britons. "If we call them Romans the term is correct politically but incorrect ethnologically. If we call them Britons the name is

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<sup>5</sup> A modern example of this is described by Cyril Pearce in his study of opposition to conscription in Huddersfield in World War I. His research appears to challenge the commonly held view that the war was popular and its domestic opponents were few and marginal. C. Pearce, Comrades in Conscience: The story of an English community's opposition to the Great War (Francis Boutle, 2001)

<sup>6</sup> Hobsbawm (1990) p.10.

<sup>7</sup> Colley (1992)

incorrect both politically and ethnologically and correct only geographically. The population was neither Roman nor British but an extraordinary mixture of all the different races who had been reduced by the arms of Rome.”<sup>8</sup> Wright’s dilemma illustrates the difficulties involved in any discussion of national identity, as definitions of ‘nation’ and ‘race’ were, and still are, notoriously slippery. Geographical boundaries, linguistic differences and cultural inheritance are just some of the criteria that can be used to identify a nation. In Britain, where there had been significant movements of different groups over long periods, identification became even more problematic. Indeed, John Burrow argues that a chief motive in the writing of English history in the Victorian period was the desire to define a national identity out of the confusion created by successive waves of invasions and conquests.<sup>9</sup>

In the early Victorian period, there were a number of different versions of British origins that reflected the different influences that had played a part in the national past: the Celt, the Roman and the Saxon. Sam Smiles has argued that the features of the chosen identity arise out of a “romantic projection into the past... in which we construct lineages to keep ourselves afloat in the choppy waters of indeterminacy and anonymity which threaten to swamp a sense of self.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the choice of a group with whom to identify is dictated by present needs and a study of these choices can help to throw light on the way in which people thought of themselves at different times. Furthermore, the story of the past can be adjusted and changed to meet current requirements. The truth or otherwise of the stories do not matter. Their importance lies in their ability to suggest versions of the past within which individuals can place themselves.

A sense of the way in which a ‘British national identity’ evolved and changed is to be gathered from various pictorial and literary images of well-known events in the country’s past. For example, in 1751 Nicholas Blakey portrayed Julius Caesar’s

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<sup>8</sup> GM, July-December 1855 p.523.

<sup>9</sup> Burrow (1981) p.9. In an article Rev. Cutts referred to, “the intermixture of races, and consequently of religions, and manners, and customs and ideas which then took place in England.” To which he added the footnote, “which is far greater than is commonly imagined; for the soldiers who occupied Britain were by no means all Italians; they were gathered from every part of the world which was subject to the Imperial power of Rome.” Trans. EAS Vol. I (1858) p.100.

<sup>10</sup> S. Smiles, (1994) p.ix



landing in Britain as a contest between equals and the accompanying note described the “brave and obstinate resistance of the ancient Britons”. But by 1847, William Linnell’s picture of the same event is dominated by the towering figure of Caesar and gives greater prominence to the might of Roman conquest.<sup>11</sup> It is not always clear whether these images reflect changes in contemporary perceptions of national identity or whether they were themselves active agents of change.

Richard Hingley also uses comparison between groups as a way of defining national identity, but rather than comparing foreigners with the British, he compares class with class. So his ‘Celtic Subaltern’ is inferior in class to the Roman officer and English gentlemen<sup>12</sup>. Hingley’s comparison is based upon a definition of ‘other’ that cuts right across any simplistic division between Romans and ancient Britons. It draws attention to the very fluid and ambiguous nature of all these comparisons, as no one edition of the past presents an ideal ancestor and each contains its own contradictions. The concept of the ‘other’ by comparison with whom an identity is achieved, can only be a partial explanation for the formation of a national identity. It suggests a possible process, but it does not explain the particular form or the changes undergone by that form over a period of time. As the nineteenth century progressed, parallels between the Roman and British empires became ever more easy to draw. But the ambiguity surrounding the nature of Britain as a modern day imperial power and a subject race of the old Roman Empire became increasingly difficult to reconcile. It was partially due to these difficulties that Saxon origins became more popular, as they appeared to offer a way out of the dilemmas presented by either Roman or Ancient British lineage.

Two points need to be emphasised. The first is that the terms ‘British’ and ‘English’ were frequently conflated by the Victorian antiquarians, thus obscuring the internal differences between the nations within the United Kingdom. The term ‘British’ implied a national cohesion that, in many instances, was more apparent than real. The second point is the way in which the results of historical and archaeological research could be used to justify and legitimise contemporary

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<sup>11</sup> S. Smiles (1994) pp.134-137 and pp.113-129

<sup>12</sup> Hingley (2000) pp.61-109. Hingley defines the ‘Celtic subaltern’ as “those of an inferior rank who are subject to a hegemony of a ruling class.” (p.10) Hingley’s study covers a period rather later than most of the material in my case studies.

events. As an example, during the Don Pacifico debate in 1850 both Lord Palmerston and Gladstone drew parallels between Roman and British imperial roles, but they reached opposite conclusions, thus demonstrating the way in which the same historical precedents could be reinterpreted to suit the demands of the present.<sup>13</sup> What is important is that the facts revealed by historical research were only the 'building bricks', the design of the edifices in which they were used were contemporary political concerns. It is often difficult to determine the influence of such political machinations on the activities of local antiquarian groups, but in so far as they were a part of the national and cultural scene, they will have helped to shape the context within which the antiquarians operated. Their traces can be detected as forming the structure within which individual and group action took place.

### Ancient British Ancestry

The most influential descriptions of the original Ancient Britons came from Roman accounts, such as Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars and Tacitus' Agricola and Annals. They portrayed a primitive but brave people who possessed few of the attributes of 'civilised life', most notably literacy. Early illustrations of the native peoples of North America by De Bray had been used as the basis for illustrations of Ancient British men and women in John Speed's Historie (1611).<sup>14</sup> These pictures were still being used in Victorian books such as an 1858 Chester Guide, to provide readers with an image of the ancient Britons, with the obvious inference that the ancient Britons closely resembled native populations discovered as a result of European voyages of discovery<sup>15</sup> {Plate XI, p.261}. Archaeological papers contain several references suggesting that the reports of native peoples were regarded as useful aids to the study of ancient Britons. For example, Richard Neville thought that because he had found most ancient British remains in open country, "they indulged their fondness for horses and frequented the plains after the manner of Red

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<sup>13</sup>Palmerston felt obliged to support Don Pacifico in his dispute with the Greek government because of his British citizenship. Gladstone opposed this, "He vaunted that under his administration an Englishman should be, throughout the world, what the citizen of Rome had been. What then was a Roman citizen?" 24<sup>th</sup> June 1850, Hansard, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, Vol CXII pp.443-4.

<sup>14</sup> Smiles (1994) p.129.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts (1858)



Indians, denizens of the great Western plains of the present day.”<sup>16</sup> And William Wire wanted to obtain curiosities from New Zealand because, “antiquarians have very few tangible remains of ancient Britons and their manners and actions are to be studied analogically (sic) by those of the inhabitants of New Zealand.”<sup>17</sup>

Underlying these comments was an assumption that the ancient Britons, like the overseas natives, were at an earlier stage of development than the Europeans and just as the ancient Britons had been civilised by contact with Rome, so would contemporary natives be civilised by contact with British colonial rule. As Rev. Cutts told the Essex Society, “to study how England and Englishmen came to be what they are, he [the antiquarian] must study first and well the history of the Roman occupation.”<sup>18</sup>

Cutts’ analysis makes the important assumption that people are capable of developmental change through a process of mediation, in which one group acquires the social and cultural features of another. In the context of Roman Britain it was a process that came to be known as Romanisation.<sup>19</sup> The term itself was not actually used by those I studied, but it is clear that they did envisage some sort of process whereby Britons became Romans. For example, Roach Smith called Hadrian’s Wall, “a great work of defence... for protecting the growing civilisation of Romanised Britain.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Joseph Mayer thought that, “the Romanised Briton differed little from the provincial Roman”, and Buckman considered the Cirencester mosaics were, “the work of *Romano-Britons*, who were of course

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<sup>16</sup> Neville (1848) p.8. Neville had been a soldier in Canada in the early 1840’s and it is possible that he had come into contact with native Americans.

<sup>17</sup> Wire letter to (unnamed) 21<sup>st</sup>, August 1851. (W.W. Letter Book 1847-1853 Essex R. O.)

<sup>18</sup> Trans. EAS Vol.I (1858) p.100.

<sup>19</sup> The term owes its prominence to the archaeologist Francis Haverfield, who presented his ideas in a paper to the British Academy in 1905. His views, much influenced by Mommsen, continued to dominate archaeological attitudes for much of the twentieth century. More recently it has been the subject of much criticism on the grounds that it ignored social meanings. See Mattingly (1997) Mattingly’s argument that Haverfield’s approach was too text-based and approached the relationship between Britain and Rome purely from the Roman point of view is probably true of the more academic and scientifically based archaeology that developed later in the nineteenth century. These methods were adopted, at least in part, to distinguish their activities from those of the amateur antiquarians whom I studied. For a more recent study of the way cultural change was brought about in the provinces of the Roman Empire and was a two way process, see Woolf (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Roach Smith (1853) p.154. Roach Smith was such an influential figure that his use of the term will have given it greater credibility. For instance, it was used by Buckman (Buckman (1850) p.8) and by Edward Lee in an address to the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club in 1875.

inferior artists when compared with the mother country.”<sup>21</sup> The use of the term ‘mother country’ is significant as it suggests the parent/child relationship that was basic to the concept of Romanisation, and it was to become a commonly used expression to describe relations between Britain and her colonies later in the century. Buckman also drew a clear distinction between Romans from outside and the Roman-Britons who were native born. “The evidence left to us of Roman sepulture in this neighbourhood show us that cremation was the custom with the Roman-British, as well as with the Greeks and Romans themselves.”<sup>22</sup> It is clear that their evidence for the changes brought about through Roman rule was heavily influenced by Tacitus’ account in the Agricola. “The nation which used to reject the Latin language began to aspire to rhetoric: further, the wearing of our dress became a distinction, and the toga came into fashion, and little by little the Britons were seduced into alluring vices: to the lounge, the bath, the well appointed dinner table.”<sup>23</sup>

But although the distinctions they drew between the different groups are clear, the antiquarians do not elaborate on the implications of the way in which cultural change was brought about. An author in the Quarterly Review appears to suggest that it is a one way process, in which one culture dominates another and there is no room for mutual exchange. “Wherever the Roman inhabited he carried with him the comforts and luxuries of his own country, and scorned to descend to the ruder habits of his subjects.”<sup>24</sup> Another author in the Archaeological Journal suggested that it was an active and conscious policy on the part of the Romans to, “implant among the conquered the seeds of civilisation and thus mould them into peaceful subjects.”<sup>25</sup> Underlying the concept of Romanisation was an implicit assumption that Roman society was superior to the local societies, probably inevitably, as all the textual evidence had been provided by the Romans. Romanisation was therefore not merely describing a process through which Britons became ‘civilised

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<sup>21</sup> Proceedings & Papers of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 1849-49 p.28 and G.W.S. 24<sup>th</sup> September 1849. (italics in original).

<sup>22</sup> Buckman & Newmarch (1850) p.111.

<sup>23</sup> Tacitus, Agricola, 21

<sup>24</sup> Q. R. Vol. 193, June 1855, p.88.

<sup>25</sup> A.J. Vol. XV (1858) p.26.



Romans', but it also implied a value judgement that was so taken for granted that there was no need to spell it out. Romanisation was a concept with a strong attraction to men who were naturally inclined to give priority to the classical civilisations for a whole range of reasons associated with their background, education and social pretensions.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of seeing Roman superiority as a 'given', it is important to note that Romanisation was based on an assumption that culture was not necessarily dependent upon race. It allowed less developed people, such as the ancient Britons, to change and progress until they were like the Romans, an imperial nation. But as new ideas began to influence opinion, race increasingly came to be seen as synonymous with culture and, therefore, cast doubt on the notion that one race could be 'civilised' through contact with another. The reports about 'natives' sent back to Britain by explorers, traders and migrants were an influential factor in these changing views. Whereas previously other races had been portrayed as noble but undeveloped, more recent travellers' accounts presented a different picture, as in Darwin's description of the natives he encountered in Tierra del Fuego. "These poor creatures were stunted in growth, their hideous faces bedaubed with white paint, their skin filthy and greasy, their hair entangled, their voices discordant, their gestures violent and without dignity. Viewing such men, one can hardly make oneself believe they are fellow creatures, and inhabitants of the same world."<sup>27</sup> If British ancestors were seen as similar to these natives, then such reports made disturbing reading.

The desire to understand the basis of human behaviour and the belief that this was possible through the study of so called primitive people and societies had led to the creation of the new science of ethnology. The Ethnological Society was founded in 1842 and although its members believed, "the various tribes of men are of one

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<sup>26</sup> Undergraduates in Cambridge were given essay topics such as 'the best means of civilising the subjects of the British empire in those parts of India controlled by the East India Company' and 'The probable design of the Divine Providence in subjecting so large a portion of Asia to the British dominion.' Cited in Colley (1992) pp.169-170.

<sup>27</sup> Darwin (1989) p.177-78. Darwin witnessed the failure of attempts to 'civilise' Jeremy Button, the native who had been taken to England for some years and returned to Tierra del Fuego with the object of him civilising his fellow natives. Accounts of cannibalism featured prominently in engravings used to illustrate missionary accounts of native people and these were distributed widely and did much to enhance the perception that these people were heathen, base and incapable of further development. See Smith (1985)

origin”<sup>28</sup>, they were anxious to stress that their primary objective was collecting factual information about other races.<sup>29</sup> But, in the climate of changing racial attitudes, it became increasingly difficult to avoid religious and political controversy.<sup>30</sup> By 1862, these disputes had become so intense that a new body, the Anthropological Society, was formed. The major difference between the two bodies was focused on possible explanations for the poor state of native societies. The Ethnological Society blamed slavery and poor government and assumed that progress was possible, whereas the anthropologists saw race alone as responsible for the poor physical and cultural characteristics observed by travellers. Although scorned by many leading intellectuals, such as Darwin and Huxley, the ideas behind the Anthropological Society gained wide acceptance, as they appeared to justify Britain’s role as a colonial power.<sup>31</sup>

Another development that appeared to support the separate development of the races was the ‘science’ of phrenology that came to prominence in the 1840s. Exponents of the new science purported to show that the brain capacity of different races varied, and that brain size could limit potential development. The antiquarian ,John Thurnam, and the anthropologist, Joseph Davis, used skulls found in ancient burial mounds to illustrate Crania Britannica (1856) in which they argued that “the forms of the cranium are permanent and not transmutable between the different races.”<sup>32</sup> Davis extended the argument even further when he claimed that there was “striking evidence of the essential differences in the moral constitution of the people from European nations [as compared with the Chinese]”.<sup>33</sup> Phrenology became enormously popular and although many of its findings were disputed, it is

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<sup>28</sup> J.C. Pritchard in a paper on ‘The contributions made by philology and anatomy to the human species’, delivered to the B.A.A.S in 1832. (Cited in Morrell & Thackray (1981) p.284)

<sup>29</sup> The new society sought to draw a distinction between facts gathering and the philanthropic activity of older organisations such as the Aborigines Society, who had been critical of Britain’s colonial activities.

<sup>30</sup> Bolt (1971); Rainger (1978-9) p.51-70; McDougall (1982) pp.119-124.

<sup>31</sup> Darwin’s ideas were used as evidence by both sides in the controversies. But Darwin himself was cautious, “It is very difficult to say why one civilised nation rises, becomes more powerful and spreads more widely than another.” Cited in McDougall (1982) p.124.

<sup>32</sup> Burnham Davis & Thurnam (1856) This quote is from a review of the book in the A.J. Vol. XIII (1856) p.422. Davis wrote about ‘The application of phrenology to archaeology and ethnology’, in A.J. Vol. XIII (1856)

<sup>33</sup> A.J., Vol. XIII (1856) p.322.



hard to believe that the huge interest it attracted did not have some influence on changing attitudes towards racial difference.<sup>34</sup>

Although these matters continued to be hotly debated, the overall effect was to ensure that contemporary native people, and by implication ancient Britons, were perceived very differently in the 1860s from the way they had been conceived earlier in the century. Amid the plethora of new data, the simplicity that had allowed the idealisation of the 'noble savage' had been lost. In its place was a hierarchy in which the ranking was determined by race, into which culture was subsumed. Probably inevitably, the Europeans who developed this theory saw their own culture at the top and native cultures at the bottom. Thus, the hierarchy of development was both a description and a justification for the attitudes to which it gave rise. It was only a relatively short step from these ideas to the notion that it was the duty of the 'superior' race to govern the 'lesser'. To people who were becoming accustomed to their role as colonialists governing different races around the world,<sup>35</sup> it was difficult to consider themselves as descended from similar native groups, and the more involved with empire Britain became, the less acceptable this analogy proved to be.<sup>36</sup>

### *Boudica and Caractacus*

Some of the ambiguity surrounding the Victorian's view of the Ancient Britons is to be seen in various representations of native leaders, such as Boudica and Caractacus. Much of their symbolic power was derived from the ease with which

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<sup>34</sup> In 1844 Wire reported that, "For some time past phrenology has been all the rage in this town." (Wire Journal 17<sup>th</sup>, February 1844) In Cirencester, T.C. Brown reported the discovery of several skulls, "There is a uniform type in the skulls-smooth, well developed, expanding towards the occiput-excepting two varying remarkably from this type." (B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.71.) See also Secord (2000) pp.69-74 and Cowling (1989) There were many critics. A comparison of the heads of Apollo, a black man and a chimpanzee was criticised in the Athenaeum; "It ought not to have been suffered in a work professedly scientific." (Athenaeum, 17<sup>th</sup>, June 1854) Cited in Cowling (1989) p.61

<sup>35</sup> There are frequent references to the demands of the British imperial role. For instance, "It is our duty to prepare ourselves for the right use of that vast power that England sways, a power over the fortunes of mankind such as no people or potentate ever before possessed." (Creasy Cited by P. Levine (1986) p.161)

<sup>36</sup> Charles Kingsley warned his Cambridge students that, "we must be careful how we compare our forefathers with these savages." (1864) p.9. He thought that British ancestors must have been superior: "if our forefathers in the German forests had been like Powhatton's people as we found them in the Virginian forests, the Romans wouldn't have been long in civilising us off the face of the earth." (Ibid. p.10) Recent research by David Finkelstein has shown how the reports of the explorer John Speke on his travels in Africa were drastically re-written to promote a view of Africans living in a 'dark continent and in need of Christianity and colonial protection.' (Article in The Guardian, 13<sup>th</sup>, August 2001)

they could be used in a variety of different interpretations. Changes in the way they were depicted give some indication of the changing views of the ancient British inheritance. In 1782, Cowper described Boadicea<sup>37</sup> as, “the British warrior queen, bleeding from the Roman rods... with matchless wrongs”, and the Romans as “ruffians, trampling on a thousand states.”<sup>38</sup> His version emphasised Roman cruelty and the British love of freedom. However in 1859 Tennyson described her as force of savage, uncivilised nature, demanding horrible restitution against the Roman citizens of Colchester. “Mad and maddening...Yelled and shrieked between her daughters.”<sup>39</sup> Tennyson’s interpretation probably reflected some of the powerful, negative emotions aroused by the Indian Mutiny two years before, in which Indian troops had killed British citizens.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of a female monarch was a particularly useful symbol when other women were on the throne. In Hollingshed’s Chronicle of 1577, Boudica is portrayed reviewing her troops in an image which, with the exception of a hare under her arm, could be Elizabeth I reviewing her troops before the Armada. The two women had been conflated into one image of the warrior queen defending the liberties of her realm. This version of the Boudica story was the basis for the famous statue in London, by Thomas Thornycroft, in which she is shown in her chariot, spear in hand, leading her troops into battle, every inch the warrior queen.<sup>41</sup> Although it was not implied that the statue resembled Victoria, honour could be done to a contemporary queen by reference to another powerful queen in the past. But Boudica could also be used in a more conventional representation of the female role. For example, a statue by James Havard Thomas shows her as the mother, on foot, unarmed and with arms protectively held around her daughters,

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<sup>37</sup> Boudica was the Celtic word for victory. However the Victorians invariably referred to her as ‘Boadicea’. I will use Boudica for my comments, but where I am quoting others I will use their spelling.

<sup>38</sup> William Cowper, Poetry and Prose (Rupert Hart Davies, London, 1968). The poem celebrates the British Empire in ‘the regions Caesar never knew.’

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poems Vol. II (C. Ricks (ed.) Longman, London, 1987).

<sup>40</sup> The Royal Academy Exhibition in 1858 contained a painting by Joseph Noel Paton ‘In Memoriam’. It showed armed Indian soldiers advancing on English women and children at Cawnpore. A critic complained “The subject is too revolting for further description...it ought not to have been hung.” (Cited in Treuherz, Victorian Painting (1993) p.114.) The picture was repainted with Highlanders coming to the rescue!

<sup>41</sup> Thornycroft is reported to have emphasised the symbolic nature of Boudica at the insistence of Prince Albert, who was no doubt aware of the propaganda value offered by the parallels between a contemporary female monarch and a great patriotic queen of the past.



possibly a more fitting tribute to Victoria, the mother of the nation<sup>42</sup> {Plate XII, p.262}.

Hence, the story of Boudica was open to many interpretations. In the eighteenth century when Britain feared invasion, she had been seen as the patriot leading her people against foreign domination. As Britain became an imperial power, she was portrayed as the almost demented leader of a savage revolt. Finally when Britain stood confidently at the zenith of imperial power, she re-appeared as the personification of Britannia, “regions Caesar never knew Thy prosperity shall sway.”<sup>43</sup> The bare bones of the story were the same. What had changed was the way in which the events had been interpreted to best suit the symbolic requirements of contemporary events.<sup>44</sup>

Caractacus was less problematic. He was male and therefore did not cause the confusion created by the image of a female warrior. His portrayal in the classical texts as a brave and dignified figure was very familiar, as Thomas Wright pointed out, “The story as related by the historian Tacitus, is the theme of every school boy.”<sup>45</sup> But that he remained an ambiguous symbol is illustrated by the reactions to Watts’ painting of ‘Caractacus led in triumph through Rome’ (1843). On the one hand the Illustrated London News described him as, “the grand old man, firm as a riven rock, and in his barbaric pride, as grim and unconquerable as a mastiff, strides through the crowded streets with more the air of a victor than of vanquished.”<sup>46</sup> But others criticised the picture for depicting the British hero as a “chained savage, led in humiliating procession by his captors.”<sup>47</sup> Another intriguing image of Caractacus was used to illustrate Hugh Roberts’ Chester Guide in 1858 {Plate XIII, p.263}. It depicts Caractacus standing erect and proud, while at his feet there is a kneeling Roman soldier releasing the chains from his feet.

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<sup>42</sup> The statue is in the City Hall in Cardiff. The two versions of Boudica could be seen as representing the two different views of the queen in Tacitus and in Dio Cassius.

<sup>43</sup> The lines are from Cowper’s poem of 1782 and are inscribed on the statue’s plinth. The sense of Roman parallels could not be more explicit!

<sup>44</sup> See Macdonald (1987) pp.40-61; Samuel (1989) p.xxvii.

<sup>45</sup> Wright (1852) p.25

<sup>46</sup> I.L.N. 8<sup>th</sup> July 1843.

<sup>47</sup> The review was in the Athenaeum and is cited in Smiles (1994) p.158. The painting won a prize in the competition for the frescoes in the new Houses of Parliament. (See Boase, 1954)

It could almost appear as though the Roman is kneeling in homage. The juxtaposition of the two figures lend a different interpretation to the relative position of conqueror and conquered, Roman and Briton, owner and slave.<sup>48</sup>

### Roman Ancestry

An alternative British identification was with the Romans themselves through the Romano-Britons. This was the traditional view that Britain had achieved 'civilisation' and owed her contemporary pre-eminence in the world to the experience of 400 years of Roman rule that had 'Romanised' the ancient Britons. In Rev. Cutts' article he describes the benefits of Roman rule. "Much of our existing institutions and habits and modes of thought, has its (sic) roots far back in Roman times."<sup>49</sup> Although he does not suggest a genealogical connection, he does draw close parallels between the Romans and the Britons, "conquering, civilising and practical, so like in many traits of their personal and national character to us Englishmen."<sup>50</sup> Cutts, was most concerned with the institutional heritage of the Romans, whereas in Cirencester, Buckman was more impressed with the evidence of architectural splendour. He described the remains of houses and other buildings and says that although the exteriors were plain, "the internal arrangements and decorations ever betokened the presidency of a spirit of elegance and refinement."<sup>51</sup> By using such words as 'comfort', 'good taste' and 'luxury', Buckman creates a picture of civilised Roman living that probably owed as much to the magnificent remains in Rome and Pompeii as it does to life in Roman Cirencester.

But there were aspects of Roman society and behaviour that were repugnant to the moral conscience of the mid-nineteenth century observer: differences that had been highlighted by Gibbon. "The untutored Caledonians, glowing with the warm virtues of nature, and the degenerate Romans polluted with the mean vices of wealth and slavery."<sup>52</sup> Rather than highlighting similarity such comparisons tended

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<sup>48</sup> The picture was published in the second edition of Roberts' *Chester Guide*, revised by John Hicklin in 1858. It is an engraving by Hollis from a daguerreotype by Beard from the original by C. Panormo. I have not seen this picture anywhere else and I have not been able to find out anything about Panormo.

<sup>49</sup> Trans. E.A.S. Vol.I (1858) p.101.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.100.

<sup>51</sup> Buckman & Newmarch (1850) p.25.

<sup>52</sup> Gibbon (1960) p.65.



to emphasis the distance between the Romans and contemporary Britons. Probably the most important of these were the Roman's pagan beliefs and their persecution of the early Christians, ideas that were particularly difficult for a Victorian audience for whom religion was still central to society. There was a feeling of abhorrence at the supposed superstition and cruelty associated with paganism, although some archaeologists did acknowledge that the later Roman Empire, which then embraced Christianity, had facilitated the religion's rapid spread. Others pointed out that the British Empire now played much the same role in taking Christianity to her colonies, "and the noble character of our missionary enterprises rivals or even excels the far-famed propaganda of Rome herself."<sup>53</sup>

An added complication was the association of Rome with Catholicism and the Papacy. In 1850, there had been widespread disquiet about the re-introduction of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain that had led to riots.<sup>54</sup> In a period of increasing national pride and confidence, in which the Protestant allegiance played such an important role, this was another factor rendering association with Rome problematic.<sup>55</sup> The Roman enthusiasm for games and gladiatorial contests was also alien. Contemporary fiction, such as Bulwer-Lytton's Last Days of Pompeii, emphasised the physicality of the contests between man and man, and man and beast.<sup>56</sup> Most references to the games emphasised the more lurid aspects, as in this description of the embossed figures on a Colchester vase, "it is well known how passionately fond the Romans were of the venatio, in which criminals, captives or

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<sup>53</sup> A.J. Vol. XIV (1857) p.36. Rev. Raikes pointed out that it was due to the long period of peace under Roman rule that, "we owe the higher blessings of the gospel." (C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol. I (1849-1855) p.16). A History of Rome published by the Religious Tract Society agreed that through Romans roads, "a machinery was provided for the devoted missionaries of the cross to use, securing the rapid transit of Christianity." (no date, around 1850).

<sup>54</sup> Some antipathy to Catholicism was noted by Wire in Chester, "When an offer was made by the Catholic priest to read a paper to the Mechanics Institute, the president said that if the Romish religion was touched upon, he would withdraw his patronage." (Wire Journal, 9<sup>th</sup>, December 1842) But Kristina Jeffes has suggested that disturbances involving aggression towards Catholics in England were prompted as much by fears that Irish migrants would take jobs away from indigenous workers as they were by religious differences. (K. Jeffes in Swift (1996) pp.102-109). This is probably an example of the different views held by various social classes.

<sup>55</sup> For the importance of Protestantism in British identity see L. Colley (1992) pp.18-54

<sup>56</sup> He uses such phrases as; "the people were warmed into blood...the interest had mounted up to the desire of sacrifice." Modern archaeologists think the British amphitheatres were used for training troops and other military purposes rather than for entertainment such as gladiatorial games, an example of the antiquarian's reliance on their knowledge of Rome to inform their interpretation of Romano-British sites.

hired bestiari hazarded their lives in conflicts with ferocious animals.”<sup>57</sup> Even a piece of pottery could offend Victorian susceptibilities, “despite our knowledge of the unrestrained sensual habits of the Romans, we are surprised to see evidence of their licentiousness paraded forth upon the domestic board.”<sup>58</sup>

Although these factors ensured that the Roman analogy could be uncomfortable, it was the comparisons between the Roman and the British Empires that proved to be the most troubling. Rev. Cutts maintained that the demise of the Roman Empire, “forms a problem which we shall do well to study, even in this nineteenth century of the Christian era.”<sup>59</sup> Most commentators emphasised the difference between the supposedly benign influences of British imperial rule and those of ‘decadent’ Rome. For instance, the author of an article on Roman roads compared them with those built by the British. “Theirs were to bind the nations of the earth in one entire chain of servility, ours to carry forth liberty to the nations and emancipation to the world.”<sup>60</sup> The antiquarians’ eagerness to demonstrate the ways in which the two empires differed can be seen as an attempt to assuage the anxiety to which such comparisons gave rise. British imperial expansion in Africa and above all, India, had meant that Britain was now ruling huge numbers of ‘coloured’ people. The same people, who, according to the new racial theories, were regarded as inherently inferior. So just as comparisons with the Roman Empire appeared to be increasingly apposite, changes in theories of race made such comparisons worrying. As Bruce remarked, “another empire has sprung into being of which Rome dreamt not. In that island where in Roman days, the painted savage shared the forest with a beast of prey, a lady sits upon her throne of state, wielding a sceptre more potent than Julius or Hadrian ever grasped.”<sup>61</sup> The problem for the Victorians was to explain just how the painted savage had become an agent of imperial power and if that had been possible in Britain, what was to stop the same switch in the balance of power between ruler and ruled in British India?

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<sup>57</sup> A.J. Vol. XVIII (1861) p.96.

<sup>58</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.9.

<sup>59</sup> Trans. E.A.S. Vol. I (1858) pp.100-101.

<sup>60</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. VI (1850) p.251.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce (1850) p.41.



Britain's dual role as both a subject nation under Roman rule and as the imperial power in contemporary India are nicely demonstrated in a description of the subject matter of the frescoes for the central corridor in the new Palace of Westminster. "Six subjects have been selected: in three Britain appears sunk in ignorance, heathen superstition and slavery; in the other three she appears instructing the savage, abolishing barbarous rites and liberating the slave."<sup>62</sup>

Much of the anxiety evoked by these comparisons was focused on the decline of the Roman Empire, a decline that was vividly underlined by the physical presence of ruined buildings and fragments of artefacts revealed by antiquarian activity and written about by poets and writers, including Pope and Wordsworth.<sup>63</sup> Rev. Bruce talked about the dilemmas presented by such evidence in his book, The Roman Wall (1850), the whole tenor of which can be seen as a commentary on imperial decline. "In the wall we have evident traces of the might of Rome, but it is the might of a giant laid prostrate... the mistress of nations is no more and the eternal city is buried in her own debris."<sup>64</sup> Gibbon's suggestion that internal decadence had been one of the reasons for Roman decline had raised the possibility that the same could occur in Britain, a possibility discussed further by Anthony Trollope in 1855. He analysed what he regarded as the possible decline of the British Empire. "What is left of Rome? We have to acknowledge that its noblest buildings and monuments were built during its decadence. Will the same have to be said of us? Is our present wealth and glory, our increasing luxury, our love of art, our polished intellect of which we are so proud; are these things but signs of our decay?"<sup>65</sup> It is perhaps hardly surprising that Bruce should conclude his book by emphasising the

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<sup>62</sup> Cited in Boase (1954) p.341.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, Alexander Pope, "See the wild wastes of all devouring years, how Rome her own sad sepulchre appears", quoted by Lord Bathurst in his speech to the B.A.A. in 1869. (B.A.A.J. Vol. XXV p.23) and William Wordsworth "On Roman Antiquities discovered at Bishopstone Herefordshire", quoted by Professor Marsden in his address to the E.A.S. in 1852. (Trans. E.A.S. Vol. I p.14) It was also common practice to use images of ruins to suggest decay and the passage of time. Probably the best known example of this was the picture of ruins in Lyell's influential book, Principles of Geology (1830-1833)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.40.

<sup>65</sup> A. Trollope, The New Zealander (written in 1855-6 1st pub. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972) p.10. This was originally written as a response to Macaulay's review of Ranke's "History of the Popes" in the E.R., Vol. CXIV (October 1840) p.228 It is interesting that Trollope should use characteristics of British civilised living that could be seen as just those attributes inherited from Rome.

responsibility of imperial rule. "The sceptre which Rome relinquished, we have taken up. Great is our honour, great our responsibility."<sup>66</sup>

### Saxon Ancestry

In 1856 the antiquarian, Thomas Bateman, referred to "the Roman legions, impelled by craving lust of power [who] reduced the painted Briton to a state of slavery."<sup>67</sup> His words illustrate the problem faced by British antiquarians and historians in their attempts to construct a version of the national past that did not involve either of these unappealing models of British origins.<sup>68</sup> Hence a version of the past that viewed British origins as Saxon provided an acceptable alternative and was to prove very useful to the British antiquarians and historians as they strove to liberate themselves from the troublesome analogies presented by a Roman or ancient British past. An early, and very influential picture of Saxon England, was Walter Scott's Ivanhoe (first published in 1820 and republished frequently), in which he developed, "a striking contrast betwixt the Saxons, by whom the soil was cultivated, and the Normans, who still reigned in it as conquerors."<sup>69</sup>

In Chapter 2, I described the way in which eighteenth century scholars in Germany and the Celtic fringe in Britain had used folk tales and oral traditions in order to construct a version of the past that was not based exclusively on the classical past. Somewhat ironically, another very important source of information about the German tribes who opposed Rome was a classical text, Tacitus' Germania. It is a rather idealised description as his intention had been to provide a contrast through which life in Rome could be criticised, but his picture of independent self-governing communities was very attractive and an important source of information for those searching for alternative versions of the past. It also served as a useful

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<sup>66</sup> Bruce (1850) p.450. Vance has drawn attention to the way leading political figures used Roman analogies in the debates concerning the creation of imperial India in the 1870's. In particular, Robert Lowe warned that, "The power of Imperial Rome was broken in conquering the world." Vance (1997) p.230.

<sup>67</sup> A.J. Vol.XIII (1856) p.421.

<sup>68</sup> I use the term 'construct' advisedly to emphasis that national identity is always fashioned to meet contemporary demands and as a result is constantly changing. I am also aware that Bateman's emotive language presents the two models in more extreme language than most of the antiquarians chose to use. But his words do demonstrate the potential drawbacks of both British and Roman antecedents.

<sup>69</sup> Sir Walter Scott, Introduction to The Waverley Novels Vol. XVI Ivanhoe (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1820. Adam and Charles Black, Edinburgh, 1860) p.4. This depiction of the brave and independent Saxons battling the 'foreign' Normans was to feature in many Victorian histories later in the century, see Asa Briggs (1966).



reminder that German tribes were among those who had helped to bring about the eventual defeat of the Roman Empire. In a European continent in which several countries had been subjected to French occupation and Napoleon had chosen to present himself as a new Caesar, Tacitus' model offered welcome parallels.

The desire for independence became focused on a romantic search for an idealised heroic past free of the Roman (or French) shadow. This was clearly articulated in De l'Allemagne by the French Protestant, Madame de Stael, who had been exiled from France as a result of her opposition to the Napoleonic regime. She suggested that the independent institutions, through which the German people were organised, had their origins in the institutions described by Tacitus in Germania. This demonstrated that the Germanic (or Teutonic) model was as old and tried as its Roman counterpart, but still possessed of sufficient energy and enthusiasm to contribute to the birth of the Reformation and hence, Protestantism. By demonstrating the links between past and present in Germany, de Stael offered another tradition to which those fighting for independence could look for inspiration. She had originally written her analysis of the differences between the cultures based on Roman classical forms and those based on the folk traditions of the North, to give coherence to a number of anti-classical reactions that she termed Romanticism. But her opposition to the Napoleonic adventures and her friendship with German intellectuals led her to revise her script in order to increase its propaganda value as a rallying call for a free and united country.<sup>70</sup> Germany had never been a united nation, but had consisted of a disparate collection of small states and free cities bound together by a vague allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire. As such, it was a good example of a hierarchical, dynastic realm that, according to Anderson, was being replaced by a nation. In de Stael's book it was described as an admirable, coherent nation and given a central position in her analysis of European history.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> The first edition of the book was pulped by French troops in 1810 and it was finally published in Britain in 1813 when it sold out within days and was to be frequently re-published in both Britain and France. See Isbell (1994).

<sup>71</sup> I have only found one direct antiquarian reference to de Stael's work and that was in a paper given to the B.A.A. conference in 1849 in Chester by Dillon Crocker on the advantages of archaeology to the study of history. Crocker was an Irishman who was keenly interested in the folk tales and stories of Ireland, another country on the Celtic fringe untouched by direct Roman influence.

By the middle of the nineteenth century this alternative Saxon version of ancestry had begun to emerge in Britain. For example, an 1844 article in the Penny Magazine, “Two nations only have left permanent impression of their laws, civil polity, social arrangements, spirit and character, on the civilised communities of modern times, the Romans and the handful of Northern people from the countries beyond the Elbe, who had never submitted to the Roman yoke.”<sup>72</sup> But the classical texts presented conflicting pictures of the ‘Northern people’. For instance, Tacitus’ Germania with its emphasis on German independence and courage was very different from that of Ammianus Marcellinus. His description of the Goths attack on Rome used phrases such as “wild beasts threatening cruel carnage”; “barbarians like savage beasts that had broken their cages, poured raging over the wide extent of Thrace”; and “this madness of times, as if the furies were confounding the whole world.”<sup>73</sup> Gibbon had used Ammianus in his Decline and Fall and, as a result, these vivid descriptions will have been well known.<sup>74</sup>

Knowledge of the Saxons and their role in English history had begun to change as German scholarship, itself partly motivated by the concern to find roots for German nationalism, became better known in Britain. Niebuhr’s work on the origins of Roman history was much admired by Thomas Arnold, who gave his version of national identity to his Oxford students in 1842. “Our history clearly begins with the coming over of the Saxons; the Britons and the Romans had lived in our country, but they are not our fathers... Our English race is the German race.”<sup>75</sup> And Grimm’s student, John Kemble, published The Saxons in England in 1849, in which he emphasised that it was the Saxons who had laid the foundations of English government, to which he attributed its subsequent stability.<sup>76</sup> Arguments about the extension of the franchise had led to an increased interest in the British

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<sup>72</sup> Penny Magazine, 7<sup>th</sup>, August 1844.

<sup>73</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, trans. John C. Rolfe (William Heinemann Ltd (Harvard University Press, 1938) 31, 9. 9; 31, 8. 9; 31, 10.1.

<sup>74</sup> In his first lecture at Cambridge, Charles Kingsley told his students that, “I suppose you all to be acquainted with the Germania of Tacitus and with the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Gibbon.” Kingsley (1864) p.1.

<sup>75</sup> Arnold (4<sup>th</sup>,ed. 1849) pp.23 & 26.

<sup>76</sup> Almost all the accounts of history at this period talk of ‘England’. I will use the word when they use it, but otherwise refer to Britain. This is a tale of continual national redefinition! Kemble was making a political point about stability as his book was published only one year after the year of revolutions on the continent. (see introduction) He was a very active member of the Archaeological Institute until his death in 1855.



constitution and therefore Kemble's emphasis on the Saxon 'mark-community' (that it was supposed they had brought to England) was particularly apposite.<sup>77</sup> By stressing that English government was modelled on small, local, self-governing units, Kemble underlined the difference between English government and those with a more centralised (and sometimes despotic) administration, such as France and, by implication, Rome. "It cannot be without advantage to us to learn how a state so favoured as our own has set about the great work of constitution and solved the problem, of uniting the completest (sic) obedience to the law with the greatest amount of individual freedom."<sup>78</sup> In 1849, another historian, Edward Freeman wrote, "We have at last learned where to look for our own fathers: we have at last discovered that we owe not more to Athenian forms of beauty, to Roman laws and government, than to those seeds of liberty and glory which the despised "barbarians" planted in his German forest."<sup>79</sup>

The lack of material evidence of the Saxon period was reflected in the small number of Saxon artefacts in museum collections. Franks' 1853 report on the contents of the recently opened British Room in the British Museum stated that, "The additions to the Saxon antiquities have not been very numerous, and that branch of national archaeology is the most deficient in the whole collection."<sup>80</sup> But under the stimulus of historical work like Kemble's the situation began to change. The increased interest in the Saxon inheritance led to the creation of several important collections of Saxon artefacts by, among others, Richard Neville in Essex, William Rolfe in Kent, William Wylie in Oxfordshire and the Secretary of the London Antiquaries, John Akerman.<sup>81</sup> Roach Smith's re-discovery of the Faussett collection of Saxon grave goods was particularly important both because of the contents and of the interest it stimulated as a result of the controversy

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<sup>77</sup> Burrow (1974) pp.260-261.

<sup>78</sup> Kemble (1849) p.vi. The date, 1849 is important because Kemble attributed the robustness of the British constitution in the face of revolutionary forces that were breaking out all over Continental Europe, to the Saxon inheritance.

<sup>79</sup> Cited in Stephens (1895) p.120. Freeman's attempts to substitute 'Saxon' words for those based on Latin became well known.

<sup>80</sup> A.J. Vol. X (1853) p.8.

<sup>81</sup> Neville's work was published in articles in the A.J. Akerman published a book, Pagan Saxondom, that was widely reviewed in the journals.

surrounding its ownership.<sup>82</sup> By the time Thomas Wright gave his lecture to the B.A.A.S. in 1855 the possibility of Saxon origins had become well established. He thought that the mixed population that had resulted from centuries of Roman rule had facilitated the amalgamation of the Saxon invaders that had followed their departure. In Wright's opinion, the towns became 'Saxonised' (sic) and the early Celtic population was very small. "In fact the popular story that the people who resisted the Saxons was the ancient Celtic population and that it retired before the conquerors until it found a last refuge in Wales is a mere fiction."<sup>83</sup>

What had emerged was a picture of Anglo Saxon society that was far removed from the old stereotype of the barbarian hordes as depicted by Ammianus Marcellinus. After Thomas Wright had seen the Faussett collection for the first time he wrote, "we are accustomed to regard them as half savages, without refinement, rude in their manners, and skilful only in the use of their weapons. But here the followers of Hengist and Horsa seem to rise up before us... our previous notions vanish... we see at once the refinements of Saxon life...and the skill and taste of Saxon workman."<sup>84</sup> Roach Smith's preface to the catalogue of the Faussett collection, Inventorium Sepulchrale (1856) is a further indication of changing views of the Saxons and is all the more striking because Roach Smith himself was so attached to the Roman inheritance. After giving a fairly standard description of the destruction wrought by the Saxon invasions, he still had to admit that they had "laws of their own and all the elements of civilisation." Further, that their artefacts were "so ingeniously and tastefully constructed and bespeaking skill of a high order that were not at all compatible with a state of barbarism."<sup>85</sup> In Roach Smith's view, the paucity of information and lack of interest in Saxon remains were all the more surprising precisely because of the frequent references that were made to the Saxon-based foundations of British institutions and laws.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> See Chapter 1: Introduction.

<sup>83</sup> G.M., July-December 1855 p.523.

<sup>84</sup> Wright (1845) p.10 (Cited in Rhodes (1993) p.221.

<sup>85</sup> Roach Smith (1856) p.xi.

<sup>86</sup> Most academic historical research over the next half century was to be concerned with the growth of the British constitution from its supposed Saxon origins, for instance, William Stubbs, Constitutional History (1873-78).



By the middle of the century the elevation of the Saxons as the ancestors of choice was well established.<sup>87</sup> They even offered a national hero, King Alfred. In 1849 an Alfred Medal was commissioned to commemorate the thousand-year anniversary of his birth. On one side was his portrait and on the other were the words, "And his children, The British Empire, United States and Anglo Saxons everywhere, 1849."<sup>88</sup> As the image of the ancient Britons and the Romans became more ambiguous and troublesome, so did the Saxons appear ever more attractive as potential ancestors. As Edward Freeman remarked, "Men's minds had at last waked to the fact that Greece and Rome did not exhaust the world's stock of wisdom and greatness."<sup>89</sup> Charles Kingsley presented it as a battle between the old world of the Romans and the new world of the Teutons. "The Teuton had at last tried his strength against the Roman. The wild forest child had found himself suddenly at death grips with the Enchanter whom he had feared, and almost worshipped for so long; and behold, to his own wonder, he was no more a child, but grown into a man."<sup>90</sup> This grown man was the ancestor of choice for the Victorians.

### Local Studies and Nationalism

During my study I looked for consistent patterns in the way in which local antiquarians responded to issues of nationalism and national identity and, in particular, whether local views differed from those expressed by national figures. I also examined whether antiquarian accounts of the past differed in the four areas of my study. I found that the response to the Celtic past was more sympathetic in Welsh Caerleon and that the antiquarians' reaction in Colchester was influenced by the town's prominent role in national events and in the classical texts.

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<sup>87</sup> Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* was probably the best known and influential fiction depicting the Saxon past.

<sup>88</sup> *I.L.N.* 27<sup>th</sup>, October 1849 p.285. The article also described the Anglo Saxon jubilee held at Wantage that included divine service, an address and music in the town hall, the distribution of food to the poor, a dinner followed by a ball in the evening. Altogether a thoroughly Victorian affair! The likeness of Alfred was described, "It exhibits the royal philosophic and philanthropic countenance, deeply imbued with Christian virtues."

<sup>89</sup> Cited in Stephens (1895) p.120.

<sup>90</sup> Kingsley (1864) p.81.

In general the antiquarians' responses to national origins were ambiguous and inconsistent, not just between group and group or from individual to individual, but frequently within one speech or paper. Most of these localities had more than one version of the past: an historical one, based on written records; and a popular one, based on local traditions and folk tales. But the most conspicuous feature of all the local group's activities was their deep concern with their own locality. They were all anxious to emphasise the importance of *their* community and attempted to relate historical events to the physical features of the local landscape and town. This concentration on the local is all the more conspicuous because of the local antiquarians' apparent lack of interest in national events and debates.

### Ambiguity and Choice

My argument so far could seem to suggest that the different versions and interpretations of the past formed a neat series of choices: classical versus romantic; ancient Britain versus Roman; Roman versus Saxon. In practice, of course, this was not the case and it is probably only with the benefit of hindsight that such choices are apparent. In reality, the views expressed by almost all the local antiquarians were a mixture. So that for instance, Rev. Raikes could describe the Romans as, "the instrument of God's providence for taming the wilderness and reducing the world to order... who brought the blessings of eternal peace and of regular government and civilisation." Then in the same lecture, "our country must have been under the iron sway of Rome and the valour of its unarmed natives must have bowed before the discipline and weapons of its conquerors."<sup>91</sup> Similarly the author of an article in the Quarterly Review described a Roman general as both a 'noble savage' and a 'gallant Roman' in the same paragraph.<sup>92</sup> And Rev. Barton Lodge described the Romans as having both 'barbarous habits' and 'great mental accomplishments' in the same sentence.<sup>93</sup> These apparent inconsistencies arise because of the frequent use of stock adjectives and phrases: for instance 'master of the world', 'conqueror' or 'barbarian' as a sort of shorthand in which one or two words are used to evoke a more complex image. They seem to have been used as

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<sup>91</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J., Vol. I (1858) Meeting on 1<sup>st</sup>, April 1850

<sup>92</sup> Q.R., Vol. 193 (1855) p.84.

<sup>93</sup> Trans. E.A.S. (1858) p.132.



rhetorical devices, and without much thought, and as a result the modern reader may attribute a meaning that was not necessarily intended.

What the inconsistencies do suggest, however, is that apart from general patriotism, local antiquarians had no clearly articulated theories of national origins. Instead, several antiquarians dealt with the mixed origins of the British by suggesting that contemporary Britons were the result of all the best qualities of the many nations who had conquered the country throughout its history. For example, Rev. Jones spoke of the contribution made by the four nations who had settled in Caerleon, the ancient Britons were 'quick in thought', the Romans were 'the go ahead people of their day', the Saxons were 'tenacious' and the Normans were 'dignified'.<sup>94</sup> By not excluding any group, these antiquarians were able to explain Britain's contemporary pre-eminence in the world by picking the most favourable aspects of all groups, while excluding the defects that caused so many tensions.

There was general agreement that the Romans had brought 'civilisation' to Britain and whatever the drawbacks of their rule might have been, the benefits to Britain had been to lay the foundations of contemporary success. Where the groups differed was in regard to the supposed contribution of the ancient Britons and the Romano-Britons, left behind after the Roman withdrawal. In Colchester, there was strong support for the idea that the indigenous British population had been well organised and relatively wealthy before the arrival of the Romans. Dr. Duncan thought that the coins produced for the British king, Cunobelin, were strong evidence in favour of a British civilisation before the Romans.<sup>95</sup> He drew a distinction between Cunobelin's coins and much cruder examples from earlier periods, "which in all probability puzzled the youthful Cunobelin quite as much as it did the modern antiquary."<sup>96</sup> William Wire supported Duncan's views; during the

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<sup>94</sup> M.M. 24<sup>th</sup>, June 1848. Dean Farrar used a similar approach in a lecture to the Harrow Literary Institute in 1857. "The Briton bequeathed us his faith and awe; the Roman his laws and order; the Saxon his freedom and manliness; the Dane his strength and intrepidity; the Norman his cultivation and enterprise. They died and passed away; and we, the children of all of them, are nobler than any. We are the heirs of all the ages in the foremost files of time." Cited in Plumb (1969) p.87. Farrar was a teacher at Harrow and the author of several books for boys.

<sup>95</sup> Trans. E.A.S. Vol.I (1858) p.26.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p.27. This comment demonstrates the antiquarians' increasing ability to differentiate between the tribes encountered by Caesar in 55 B.C.E. and the more advanced society defeated in the Claudian invasion a hundred years later.

controversy surrounding the location of the Tribantine capital of Camulodunum, he wrote to Roach Smith, "I cannot conceive of a place to have been the chief town and residence of royalty and to have left no vestiges of its former occupancy."<sup>97</sup> It is clear that Wire and Duncan were envisioning a more developed and sophisticated society than the crude picture depicted by some other antiquarians.

An author in the Quarterly Review was also inclined to see the Trinovantes tribe as civilised. "The successor of Cassivellaunus [who had led the resistance to Julius Caesar] was not a mere wild man of the woods dwelling in a stockade at the centre of a morass. The court of Cunobelinus, called by Shakespeare Cymbeline, was not perhaps, much less refined than it appears in the poet's strange medley of fact and fancy. It was the resort of Italians no less than Gauls; and the chamber of the king's daughter may well have been adorned with stories from Southern mythology, for the coinage of the king of the Trinobantes, the only monument of his civilisation we might expect to survive, is not unworthy in style and execution of a Roman mint."<sup>98</sup> Wire, Duncan and the anonymous author in the Quarterly Review were agreed that the defeated Britons, in spite of leaving no written record, were not primitive in terms of their social organisation and skills. But it is interesting that they measured the tribes' level of civilisation using Roman standards. This would seem to suggest that they were more influenced by the classical world than they were willing to admit!

Thanks to the Essex tribes' high profile in the classical texts, more was known about them than was known about the tribes in any other part of the country. The antiquarians were aware that they were looking at the vestiges of a more developed society introduced by recent migrations from the continent. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that these positive attitudes to the ancient Britons should occur in Colchester. What is surprising is that although the antiquarians describe the town's destruction during the revolt, they hardly mention Boudica. A possible explanation for this could be that the lurid details of murder and revenge in a

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<sup>97</sup> Wire letter to Roach Smith 1<sup>st</sup> December 1851. In another letter he remarked that they would only have left so little behind if, "they were in so rude a state as to lap water with their tongues and eat food of leaves." (Wire letter 8<sup>th</sup>, December 1851)

<sup>98</sup> Q.R. Vol.193 June 1855. In his journal, Wire reported, "I have been credibly informed that the author is the Rev. Merivale of Lawford. (Wire Journal 21<sup>st</sup>, July 1855) Merivale was both a cleric and the author of books on the history of Rome.



report such as that of Dio Cassius was difficult to connect with their generally more positive view of the British tribes and, as a result, her part in the drama was ignored. The more detailed knowledge of Colchester's past allowed a fuller and less stereotyped picture, but it also highlighted the ambiguities presented by an apparently civilised society led by a woman behaving with cruel barbarity. What is clear is that in the Essex society, attitudes towards the different groups of origin were divided. I have already cited Rev. Cutts' views as representative of those who felt that Roman influence was the dominant factor in British civilisation. But others disagreed and William Wire, for instance, makes no reference to the debt owed to the Romans. It is possible that Wire's lack of a conventional classical education enabled him to appreciate more easily the contribution of other ancestral groups. But it is also likely that differences of opinion regarding the origins of British society were a reflection of the social divides within the Essex group itself.<sup>99</sup>

The Caerleon society was another group that gave a prominent place to non-Roman origins both ancient Britons and the Romano-British in the person of King Arthur. Rev. Jones described, "the four distinguished nations who have in turn occupied the ground upon which we now stand, the Ancient Britons, the Romans, the Saxons and the Normans... Of the four which have each in turn been the familiar tongue of this place, the two which have survived have been the language of the oppressed and of the conquered, not the language of the conquerors."<sup>100</sup> He went on to identify himself as an ancient Briton and, although he does not say so, it is probable that he spoke Welsh, the language of an oppressed people. His description was a useful device to emphasise the mixture of different peoples coming together in contemporary South Wales.<sup>101</sup> But his use of language is provocative since he was speaking at a time when the central government in London was actively trying to discourage the Welsh language. The notorious Blue

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<sup>99</sup> Norman Vance makes the point that the controversy about the possible Roman origins of the Norman castle arose from, "unacknowledged reluctance to confront the evidence of conquest despite genuine fascination with the relics of Empire." Vance (1997) p.241. I will examine the possible interaction between the social position of individual antiquarians and their views of the past in the next chapter.

<sup>100</sup> M.M. 24<sup>th</sup>, June 1848

<sup>101</sup> A rather different, all be it somewhat patronising view of the Welsh is given in Lady Charlotte Guest's description, "All Saxon as I am, my own countrymen chill my shyness into pride. But the dear Welsh, with their ready smile and never failing welcome, make me feel amongst them as another being." Bessborough (1950) p.182. Lady Charlotte had translated the traditional Welsh poem, Mabinogion into English in 1843.

Books on Welsh education had just been published and had dramatically illustrated the fear of Welsh workers felt by the ruling class.<sup>102</sup> The anger with which the reports were received became known as 'The Treason of the Blue Books' a reference to the treason of the long knives, an old Celtic story according to which the leader of the ancient Britons, Vortigen, had been treacherously killed by the Saxon leaders, Hengist and Horsa. The story had become useful again in the 1840s to describe the way in which Saxon England was not to be trusted in its dealings with the Welsh.<sup>103</sup> By proclaiming himself an ancient Briton, Jones was clearly positioning himself on the side of the conquered, whose language was under threat. It was an oblique political point, but it will not have been lost on his audience and it needs to be understood if the modern observer is to make sense of Jones' portrayal of the past and its relevance to contemporary concerns.

The interest that Welsh antiquarians showed in the details of the Roman conquest of Wales can be interpreted as one way in which resurgent Welsh nationalism found an acceptable voice in the 1840s. The Archaeologia Cambrensis was founded in 1846 and contained several articles that portrayed the brave Britons defending themselves against foreign usurpers.<sup>104</sup> For instance an article by Samuel Meyrick in 1848 maintained that the Romans, "while they appeared to be only putting an end to the horrid rites of human sacrifice, they were in reality undermining the powers assumed by the Druids and riveting more firmly the chains of those they had subdued."<sup>105</sup> Caractacus proved useful as a symbol of independence and resistance to outside occupation and as such he was 'adopted' by some Welsh

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<sup>102</sup> See chapter on Caerleon. The English newspaper reports on the Blue Books are revealing as they illustrate the way in which Welsh workers were perceived by at least some English observers. For instance the Morning Chronicle declared that, "the Welsh are fast settling down into the most savage barbarism", and the Examiner thought that Welsh habits were, "those of animals and would not bear description." (Williams (1950) p.274) Such comments would suggest that English observers saw little difference between contemporary Welsh people and the Ancient British.

<sup>103</sup> The Welsh language and the dissenting chapels were seen as the unifying factors around which revolt might be organised. See Williams (1950) p.199-215. Williams cites a warning letter sent by 'Rebecca' (during the Rebecca Riots in Wales 1839-1843). "It is a shameful (sic) thing for us Welshmen to have the sons of Hengist to have dominion over us, do you not remember the long knives, which Hengist hath invented to kill our forefathers and you may depend that you shall receive the same if you will not give up when I shall call to visit you." (based on PRO, HO/45/265)

<sup>104</sup> A.C. had two editors, Rev. H. Longueville Jones and Rev. John Williams. The latter's main interest was philology and he was a fanatical supporter of Welsh nationalism, preferring to call himself by the Welsh name, Ab Ithel. His views eventually led to disagreements and he resigned as joint editor. But it is probable that his opinions were shared by at least some of the journal's subscribers.

<sup>105</sup> A.C. Vol.III (1848) p.14.



antiquaries. In an article on a supposed site of his final battle with the Romans, one author describes him as, “Caractacus the renowned leader of the Silures [who] made his last stand in defence of the liberties of his country.”<sup>106</sup> Another article about the site of the same battle illustrates the ambiguity at the heart of all these conflicts between Rome and the ancient Britons. “Whether we view it with the patriotism of a Britain, or with a grateful sense of Roman benefaction, we must regard that event as the commencement of an important era in the history of Wales.”<sup>107</sup> The fact that Caractacus was not a member of the Silures tribe and that there is no evidence that this last battle was fought in Wales was not going to interfere with these fanciful references.

### Alternative Histories

What the articles illustrate is that there were many differing versions of what happened in the past and the accuracy of such stories mattered less than that they should satisfy the particular needs of the audience for whom they were intended. According to Raphael Samuel, “myth and history are not incompatible, but coexist as complementary and sometimes intersecting modes of representing the past.”<sup>108</sup> Certainly, all four areas I studied had their own versions of the local past. In each case there was the history based on evidence, contained in texts and artefacts (what could be termed the professional account), and then there were the unofficial accounts, based on myths, legend and stories passed from one generation to another, often by word of mouth. Towards the end of the nineteenth century as historians and archaeologists struggled to gain acceptance for themselves as professional academics, one of the methods they used to distinguish themselves from the amateur activities of the antiquarians was to scorn the contribution and relevance of these other accounts. But during the period I have been studying many antiquarians were still debating and giving credence to these other histories, as happened in the debates about Geoffrey of Monmouth’s account of British origins discussed earlier.<sup>109</sup> For example, when Roach Smith excavated the fallen walls at

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<sup>106</sup> A.C. Vol. II new series (1851) p.45.

<sup>107</sup> A.C. Vol. II new series (1851) p.122.

<sup>108</sup> Samuel (1998) p.14.

<sup>109</sup> See Chapter 2: Setting the Scene.

the Roman fortress at Lymne, he found that, “popular tradition had attributed the destruction to an earthquake; and this belief, it is now proved, was nearer the truth than the notion of those who attributed its overthrow to the Saxons.”<sup>110</sup>

These alternative versions allowed local individuals and events to play a part although they might well be excluded from more official records. As Richard Neville pointed out, “where authentic narrative fails, popular tradition is the ground work of history.” In Essex there appears to have been a strong local tradition that the Danes had played a significant role and that the local Bartlow Hills, “owed their elevation to the Danes, being raised to cover the bodies of those slain in battle between Canute and Edmund Ironside.”<sup>111</sup> Although Neville’s excavations came to the conclusion that the mounds were Roman, the appeal of the Danish stories continued, presumably because they involved events that had had a major impact on the locality and had therefore been retained in oral accounts. Neville recognised that these local traditions were both popular and resistant to analysis. “Some antiquarians may be dissatisfied with my endeavours to penetrate the mist that floats around these gigantic fosses, since by throwing light upon their construction and eliciting their true date the stories relative to their early origins must necessarily be destroyed.”<sup>112</sup>

Caerleon’s claim to have been the site of King Arthur’s court was the best known and most fully developed alternative version of the past I encountered. The story had been constructed, at least in part, for nationalist purposes. It had first been put forward in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain (1138-39) in which Arthur is described as a great British king who defeated the Saxons and created an empire. The book was written against the background of a Welsh revolt against the Normans in South Wales in which Welsh lords recaptured most of the area, including Caerleon. A story that offered ancient origins and a leader who led his people to victory over a foreign invader was particularly welcome when the

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<sup>110</sup> Roach Smith (1852) p.7.

<sup>111</sup> Neville (1847) p.30.

<sup>112</sup> Neville (1848) p.55.



Welsh were under attack from either the Normans or the English.<sup>113</sup> By the beginning of the nineteenth century most antiquarians were agreed that the account in Geoffrey's history was a legend, but local people did not agree. According to Coxe, "the natives of Caerleon... point out the remains of the Roman amphitheatre, under the name of King Alfred's Round Table, from a supposition that a military order was here instituted, which first raised the spirit of chivalry in Europe."<sup>114</sup> The power and appeal of the Arthur legend is to be seen by the number of times it was retold, for instance in the Celtic epic The Mabinogion that Lady Charlotte Guest translated into English in 1843 and yet again in Tennyson's epic The Idyll of the Kings. The Geraint and Enid section of the poem includes a reference to the tension between cultures that is personified in the ruins of Caerleon.

*Who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome  
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd  
The Idolaters and made the people free?  
Who should be king, save him who makes us free?*<sup>115</sup>

The appeal of the Arthur story lay in the way it lent itself to be used as a symbol of resistance against outsiders, be they Roman, Norman or English.

### The Importance Of Place

It had always been maintained that the objective of the local antiquarian societies was to discover and illustrate all aspects of the history of their own locality, as the Dean of Llandaff reminded the Cambrian Archaeological Association. "The local antiquary was ever the only effective purveyor of local materials; he was animated by the keen zeal of local affections; and in investigating the history and remains of his own district, felt himself really engaged in elucidating the bygone fortunes of

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<sup>113</sup> See Howells (2000) p.58. Howells argues that the Welsh used the extensive Roman remains to enhance their prestige in their fight to regain independence from the Normans. It was to ensure that this could not happen again that the Normans destroyed most of the remaining Roman buildings when they recaptured the town in 1217.

<sup>114</sup> Coxe (1<sup>st</sup>, ed. 1801. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Davies & Co., Brecon, 1904) p.102. It is possible that Henry VII, a Welshman, was also invoking the legend when he named his eldest son, Arthur in 1486. Certainly, the subject for the chair competition in the 1858 National Eisteddfod was the Battle of Bosworth, at which the Welsh Henry beat the English Richard.

<sup>115</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson (1971).

his own immediate ancestry; he alone possessed that full and accurate knowledge of local details which others must want.”<sup>116</sup> Whereas an increasingly professional body of historians and archaeologists concerned themselves with detailed accounts of specific aspects of the national past, it was the minutiae of local events and the local topography that fired the imagination of the local antiquarians. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the lack of interest that the local societies showed in the national organisations. Although they all subscribed to either the Archaeological Institute or the British Archaeological Association, and in many cases both, the individual local members were largely uninvolved in national campaigns. Indeed it would be possible to read local journals and accounts of meetings and be left totally unaware of national debates, such as the founding of a British Room in the British Museum or the fate of the Faussett collection; issues that loomed so large in the national bodies. The only exceptions were those individuals who were already involved in other arenas of public life. For example, Octavius Morgan was an M.P. and chaired meetings of the London Society of Antiquaries and Richard Neville, who as Lord Braybrook sat in the House of Lords, was a vice president of the Archaeological Institute. But in most cases, even those men who were most active at a local level, such as Edward Lee in Caerleon and Rev. Massie in Chester, did not comment on national affairs. This is not say that they were uninterested or unpatriotic, merely that they had a different agenda and used different methods to achieve their ends.

The antiquarians’ local pride and patriotism is apparent in the links they attempted to draw between their own locality and well known figures and events in national history. In effect, they ‘borrowed’ national figures and pictured them against the backdrop of their own town. This could involve imagining the march of events in a particular location, as Mr Hicklin told the Archaeological Institute’s meeting in Chester. “The walls of Chester have echoed to the tramp of the legions of Rome; here the raven standard of the Danes floated amidst scenes of carnage and tumult; here the Barons of the Norman court have displayed all the chivalry of history.”<sup>117</sup> In other instances, the antiquarians imagined single, well-known figures acting out

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<sup>116</sup> A.C. Vol. IV (1849) p.299.

<sup>117</sup> A.J. Vol. XIV (1857) p.366.



their historical role against a particular local scene. For example, one claim was that Agricola may have had his headquarters for his Welsh campaigns in Chester. “The very spot on which we are met, the point where the streets intersect was doubtless the Praetorium... Agricola may have held his councils and issued his orders to the twentieth legion from this, the central part of the city.”<sup>118</sup> As Professor Marsden remarked, “we are bound by association to the scenes which were once frequented by great and good men.”<sup>119</sup> He illustrated his argument by describing a grassy slope outside the castle walls where the commanders of the royalist garrison had been shot after the town fell to parliamentary troops in 1648. “An interest deep and sad, is at once created in regard to the spot on which he would not otherwise have bestowed a single thought.”<sup>120</sup>

Marsden believed that these associations were one advantage of living in an old country. “The Americans who visit England have no such reminiscences at home, are found in many instances to show as much interest in these of their mother country as we do ourselves.”<sup>121</sup> It is a pity that he did not choose to elaborate on the particular nature of the advantage, but I would speculate that he was suggesting that a sense of belonging to one place that had remained intact over a long period was reassuring to its inhabitants. In France, Germany and Italy, where there had been major political changes involving the very existence of the nation state, governments had attempted to create a national past with which individuals could identify. In effect, these national myths were a means of shoring up shaky regimes – what Dietler has called “a highly politicised construction of national memory and identification.”<sup>122</sup> By contrast, in Britain the difficulties had been created for individuals, brought about by the massive social changes involved in industrialisation and urbanisation. One way of dealing with these upheavals was for

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<sup>118</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol. I 1849-1855. Rev. Raikes speech to the inaugural meeting 1<sup>st</sup>, April 1850.

<sup>119</sup> Trans. E.A.S. Vol. I (1858) p.23.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p.24.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* Marsden’s use of the phrase ‘mother country’ is interesting; could he be making an oblique reference to America’s former colonial status?

<sup>122</sup> Dietler (1998) p.76. Dietler quotes Napoleon III in 1866. “In honouring the memory of Vercingetorix, we must not lament his defeat. Let us admire the ardent and sincere love of this Gallic chief for the independence of his country, but let us not forget that it is due to the Roman armies that we owe our civilisation; our institutions, our customs, our language, all this comes to us from the conquest.” Picking the best attributes of all national origins was not an activity confined to the British antiquarians!

individuals to create a sense of belonging to a specific locality through involvement with its past. And if that locality had played some conspicuous part in national events or had been particularly splendid, then some of that prominence and prestige could still be attached to the contemporary town and, by association, to its inhabitants. What the local antiquarians were doing, maybe unknowingly, was to trace local origins and in so doing, giving local people a sense of pride and identity with 'their' town. The function of the numerous local societies was to provide an arena in which they could do so. It is therefore to an examination of the social aspects of these societies within their communities to which I turn in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER 8: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT**

In this chapter I examine the way in which the antiquarian movement has to be seen against the backdrop of what was going on in the wider world of mid-century Britain. The antiquarian groups appear to have been a remarkable mirror of social trends at large. One strand shows a clear social elite, confirming and reaffirming itself as the arbiter of all things artistic and cultural and exercising power over who shall be allowed to join this exclusive group. But another, newer strand develops – that of professionalism and reason, of a reaction to the closed cliques and to the conservatism of title and status suppressing newly acquired knowledge and understanding.

Philippa Levine has described antiquarians in the nineteenth century as, “a highly motivated self-taught elite on familiar and friendly terms with one another and sharing a common body of knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> She quotes several studies that have examined the personal and social characteristics of writers and other professionals in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> What they showed were that such individuals predominantly were male, many of them were graduates of Oxford or Cambridge and most had entered some form of professional occupation which gave them a secure income and an acknowledged place in a society that was still largely class bound. They were almost certainly Anglican. These shared characteristics and experiences ensured that most individuals in this ‘elite’ had a common value system. It was based on similar educational experiences, dominated by the study of the classics, and supported by a conventional view of the Anglican doctrine about the physical world and man’s place within it.<sup>3</sup> Levine argues that the social characteristics of the ruling elites within local communities were reflected in the membership of the antiquarian groups, perhaps not surprisingly, as they were frequently composed of the same individuals. She concludes, “it was this

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<sup>1</sup> Levine (1986) p.7.

<sup>2</sup> For instance Galton’s English Men of Science (1874) and Altick’s analysis of British writers (1962) See Levine pp.8-10.

<sup>3</sup> Stray (1998) p.1. Also see Colley (1992) pp.167-170. Gathorne-Hardy (1977) pp.136-143.

coalescence of community and class that prompted perception of their common experience as binding and correct.”<sup>4</sup>

Levine’s views are supported by other studies of intellectual and scientific groups in provincial society of the period.<sup>5</sup> As an example, in a series of papers on the relationship between ideas and their social context, Inkster has argued that “science has social functions in the social system and social uses for the individuals comprising it.”<sup>6</sup> According to this view, the subject matter or overt aim is only one function of a group; its social roles are equally important although rarely spelled out. Neve has examined the ways in which ideas can be utilised socially. Either they can be used “among marginal men as a means of social legitimisation”, or “they can play a decisive role within established elites in the manufacture of a new language of authority and political power.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, new ideas and their associated organisations could be used as a vehicle either to attack or to confirm the social status quo. They had an important role to play in the confrontation between the growing numbers of the professional middle class and the traditional social networks of authority and control, particularly in industrial urban areas.<sup>8</sup> The ruling group could assimilate aspiring new members and make use of their skills and knowledge to strengthen the status quo, as was the case in the careers of Edward Lee in Caerleon and John Buckman in Cirencester. Alternatively, such individuals could be ostracised as happened in the case of William Wire in Colchester. And excluded individuals could, in theory, create alternative groups to challenge the traditional ruling networks.

In general, the areas I examined support Levine’s views. I found that the local societies, and most especially their committees, were composed of individuals who played a major part in all aspects of town life. The same individuals formed a complex network of overlapping contacts operating in many facets of society and

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<sup>4</sup> Levine (1986) p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Inkster & Morrell (1983), Morrell & Thackray (1981) pp.1-35.

<sup>6</sup> Inkster (1983) p.14.

<sup>7</sup> Neve (1983) p.179.

<sup>8</sup> See Fraser (1979) His work suggests a contest for power both within the urban elite and between them and the landed gentry. (p.14).



frequently reinforced by marriage and family ties. It was through their dominant position that these socially cohesive groups were able to retain and control local power. Even in the case of Cirencester, where no group emerged, this appeared to be a consequence of the community's acceptance of Bathurst's pre-eminent position.

In Caerleon, Colchester and Cirencester, ownership was in the form of collections and museums, whose changing location and form often symbolised changes in the locus of control. This close identification between place and the ruling group meant that anything that enhanced the supposed importance of a locality also increased the prestige of its governing body. In much the same way that nation states sought to increase national pride by laying claim to a glorious past, so a town's leading citizens were eager to embrace evidence of the importance of their locality in the national past. It followed that the findings of the local archaeologists' activities were to be seen as not only important to the town, but also increased the standing of its leaders. Local archaeology and the interests of the ruling group could thus be seen as mutually reinforcing. Moreover, in the case of my groups, who were specifically chosen because they had played a conspicuous part in the unearthing of Roman Britain, the material evidence of that association with the classical Roman past could be seen as endowing those involved with some social advantage. Precisely because knowledge of the classical world, and in particular, an ownership of classical artefacts, had been taken as a manifestation of gentility, the evidence of such associations could only confirm the social standing of those involved and thus justify their position.

### The Local Groups

Most of the available evidence describes the committee members rather than the membership in general, of which I have only very limited information. Therefore I have assumed that the social characteristics of the membership were *broadly* similar to those of the committee and my comments are based on this assumption. It is difficult to gauge the extent of individual members' involvement. But in all the groups the same names appear year after year as both committee members and authors of the journal articles, and the names of those in general membership are

conspicuous only by their non-appearance!<sup>9</sup> I would speculate that one possible difference was that the committee members were more interested in the study of the past, whereas the ordinary members were more interested in being identified as a member of the ruling elite. There was some evidence in Chester that this was the case.

Some idea of group composition can be gathered from the limited lists that have survived, for instance the list of subscribers to the fund for building the Museum of Antiquities in Caerleon.<sup>10</sup> It contains 48 names and in a few cases the town where they live is identified. Of the 48, one is a bishop, five are Anglican ministers, two are identified by their rank as ex-soldiers and two are Members of Parliament. There are only three women. By 1863, the membership had risen to 149 most of them living locally. The list contains a large number of the leading county families and many of the most prominent business and industrial names from nearby Newport. The numbers of Anglican ministers had risen to about a quarter of the total membership and there were 24 women. The number of leading citizens suggests that the society was regarded as one of the bodies which leading members of society considered worthy of their patronage.<sup>11</sup>

Social events played a crucial role in creating group cohesion and fostering shared interests. They demonstrated the social importance of the members and in so doing, confirmed their sense of superiority and security to both themselves and the community. Society journals and local newspaper reports provide numerous examples of group outings and activities that emphasised group solidarity as much as they helped the furtherance of archaeological knowledge. One example is a report of a bazaar held by the Caerleon group in 1848 to raise money for the new museum. "The bells rang their best peal, the town wore quite a gala appearance, and the leading inhabitants kept open house and furnished hospitable tables,

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<sup>9</sup> This appears to have caused some annoyance. See Lee's reports to the C.A.A. and Massie's obituary notice.

<sup>10</sup> Jones (1991) contains a photocopy of the list. Its whereabouts are not given.

<sup>11</sup> The list appears as an appendix to a report by Morgan and Wakeman on local castles. Most of the women were relatives of the male members, which underlines the importance of the social aspects of the group's activities. An early member was Elizabeth Pritchard who had a large collection of artefacts that she donated to the museum.



terminating the day with a dance.”<sup>12</sup> Or in a very different vein, the journal account of Rev. Massie’s funeral in Chester. “To the solemn music of The Dead March, and a funeral peal from the muffled bells, the mournful procession, composed of clergy, magistrates, citizens and soldiery moved on towards the cemetery.”<sup>13</sup> In both cases the leading citizens’ involvement with archaeology and with the town seems to merge into one, each part indivisible from the rest.

The Chester Society was the only group to hold regular monthly meetings open to all the membership. The impression gained from the journal is that many of these meetings were regarded more as pleasant social events than anything to do with archaeology. (Hence the reference to a ‘large and fashionable gathering’ at a meeting in 1860 already referred to.) It is possible that the covert function of the Chester society, namely that of providing another forum in which the members could meet others in the same social circle, had been so successful that its stated overt aims were in danger of being lost. This problem was not confined to Chester or to antiquarian societies. The AI was told in 1858 that “the business of the Institute must not be confined to the study of archaeology by means of hospitable entertainments, however pleasant that course might be. But the scientific department however dry or tedious, should be strictly followed up.”<sup>14</sup> The ruling committees on the other hand, met regularly and thus probably reinforced their dominance within the groups.

Antiquarians also maintained links with each other through regular meetings with other societies. Many of these took place at the annual meetings of the national archaeological bodies that took place over five days in a variety of British cities. When the Archaeological Institute visited Caerleon in 1851, the whole party of 80 guests sat down to a picnic in the middle of the Roman Amphitheatre. At the Chester meeting in 1857, a large party went by special train to Liverpool, where a long day of sightseeing was rounded off with, “a brilliant conversazione to which

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<sup>12</sup> M.M. 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1848

<sup>13</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. Vol. I p.404.

<sup>14</sup> A.J. Vol.XIV (1858) p.369. In his study of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Morris describes a similar situation. “For many members, the Phil. and Lit. became one aspect of their leisure and relaxation with only a thin veneer of education.” (Morris (1990) p.232)

they had been invited by the Historic Society of Lancashire in the Town Hall.”<sup>15</sup> Less formal gatherings were also used to identify members of the elite group. The Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard reported that an excursion train had brought a number of visitors from London to see the contents of the new museum in Cirencester. The article listed the names of all the visitors, evidence of the way in which such reports could allow fellow antiquarians to identify each other and share the same information.<sup>16</sup>

Another practice that assisted both the spread of information and the identification of fellow enthusiasts was through the lists of subscribers to archaeological books and journals. It was common practice at this time to print books for subscription only. The prospective author would advertise his intention to write a book and invite those interested to subscribe. The names of the subscribers would subsequently be listed in the publication. Apart from the obvious advantage of assured sales, these lists could serve to demonstrate to contemporary society the interest and taste of those named. Many of the archaeological books were published in this way, including most of Roach Smith’s volumes of Collectanea Antiqua and Richard Neville’s books on Roman archaeology in Essex.<sup>17</sup> In these relatively small social circles, many of the names will have been widely familiar and will have enhanced the sense of belonging to a group with shared intellectual tastes and social position.<sup>18</sup>

These shared social and intellectual activities were based upon more fundamental and basic similarities that were common to most, (although not all) the group leaders and members. These were money, leisure and an acknowledged position within their local communities, generally based on shared political and religious

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<sup>15</sup> A.J. VOL.XIV (1858) p.378.

<sup>16</sup> W.G.S. 4<sup>th</sup> August 1860. The importance of the railways in enabling easy access to archaeological site should not be underestimated. The Annual Meeting of the AI went to the Wroxeter site from Gloucester in 1860. Roach Smith persuaded the London and Southeast Railway to give him a free pass to travel to the site of his excavation in Lymne. “They soon found that the excavations attracted hundreds weekly; and that it was to their interest to encourage them.” Roach Smith (1883) p.207.

<sup>17</sup> Roach Smith Collectanea Antiqua Vols.I-VI published privately between 1848-1868. Richard Neville, Antiqua Explorata (1847) and Sepulchra Exposita (1848) both printed privately.

<sup>18</sup> For the modern researcher the subscribers lists give some indication of the audience for particular books and subjects. Many names appear repeatedly, for instance, Roach Smith, Lee, Neville, Bruce and Way. Just as informative is the non-appearance of other names. For instance, I have never seen Buckman’s name on a subscribers list, that would suggest that he confined his interests to antiquities in his own area.



views. These three characteristics were so closely related to each other that, although there were individual exceptions, they apply to the majority of the members. Antiquarianism was essentially an amateur pursuit and therefore it was necessary that an individual should have other sources of income in order to allow sufficient free time to devote to antiquarian activities. All of the local leaders in my study had either private means or a career or business that rendered an income without demanding a full-time commitment. Sir Digby Mackworth, Octavius Morgan and Thomas Wakeman in Caerleon, John Taylor and Henry Vint in Colchester and the architects, Harrison and Penson in Chester are all examples of such men, as are the large numbers of ministers.<sup>19</sup>

Chester provides the best example of a socially cohesive group that faithfully reflected the main features of the local society. Its committee was intentionally composed of representatives of the powerful Anglican hierarchy connected with the bishopric. It is not recorded whose idea this was, but it is possible that this was the accepted and normal way of doing things in a city so heavily dominated by the church. Because Chester had largely avoided major industrialisation, its middle class was more traditionally based in the professions, rather than in the innovating world of industry and science, as were the larger cities of the north-west, including Liverpool and Manchester. It was a society that still represented in many aspects the older structures of power and authority pre-dating the Industrial Revolution. In 1880, a local councillor commented on the city's lack of enterprise. "I am afraid there is a spirit in the council that would push Chester into a corner and make it little better than a village."<sup>20</sup> If Hemingway's 1831 description is reasonably accurate, it was a town which actively traded on its stability and unchanging aspects in order to attract the more conservative minded to come and live in it. The concentration on architecture and the desire to retain the ancient-looking façade are indicative of more than mere economic interest. They also suggest a conservative outlook that sought reassurance in the continuity of the religious institutions and the physical manifestations of the city's links with the past. Unlike Colchester, where new developments were leading to a polarisation of many of the town's

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<sup>19</sup> Levine (1986) Appendix V. 'Clerical membership of local societies'.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Herson (1996) p.40.

institutions, in Chester there was an apparent social harmony that did not require its citizens to proclaim allegiances or to position themselves as belonging to one social class rather than another. It was not that they did not exist, rather that they were so generally accepted as to render the polarisation of interests relatively unnecessary.

The Chester group also illustrates the way in which certain leading citizens played a variety of different roles, in which their membership of the antiquarian society was only one part of a multi-faceted involvement with the town's civic life. Rev. Massie's obituary in the Society's journal praised his work with the poor during the 1849 cholera epidemic; a concern that found expression in his work as a member of the Sanitary Committee and as an active campaigner for sanitary reform. Rev. Raikes was very involved in the creation of a Ragged School Institution to provide schooling for the poorest children in the town. Another committee member and curator of the society's informal museum, Thomas Pullen, had helped to set up the public baths, the Mechanics' Institute and the Water Tower museum and its associated gardens. It was through their involvement with a number of bodies, operating in all aspects of the town's life, that these leading citizens confirmed their position as natural leaders in Chester. Seen in this context their involvement with the C.A.S. was just one other connection amongst many others. The Chester society members were so confident of their stable social position that they felt able to offer membership to the working men of the city, something that no other society felt able to do. But as the nature of their activities in setting up 'improving institutions' suggests, their involvement with working people was almost akin to civilising the natives overseas.<sup>21</sup> The noticeable lack of response to this traditional, paternalistic gesture might suggest that social harmony was not quite as complete as the city fathers might have hoped.<sup>22</sup>

If Chester is an example of a group that successfully upheld and reinforced social cohesion, then the Essex antiquarians illustrate a society attempting to contain

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<sup>21</sup> In *Ornamentalism*, Cannadine argues that the traditional hierarchy of power at 'home' was reproduced in the Empire, in such a way that the factory workers were equated with native people abroad. The assumption was that both groups were inferior and had to be controlled. See Morris and Roger (1993) pp. 34-35.

<sup>22</sup> A similar lack of enthusiasm on the part of the workers was evident in the Mechanics Institute in Newport. (See p.184)



social dissent. The manner in which the Essex Archaeological Society took over the original Colchester group and, in so doing, marginalised William Wire, is an example of the way in which a less confident group dealt with the aspirations of those who could be seen as a possible threat to their interests. Again it is the context in which these events were played out that help to explain their meaning.

As I outlined in the Colchester chapter, every aspect of social and religious activity in the town was divided along both political and religious lines, reflecting in microcosm many of the disputes in contemporary British society. On one side were the Tories, who had traditionally dominated the corporation and had links with the county gentry. Their mouthpiece was the Essex Standard and they upheld the favoured position of the Anglican Church. The Liberal opposition was based in the many dissenting chapels in the town. Following their failure to retain power in the new corporation, the Liberals attempted to bring their influence to bear through such bodies as the Poor Law Guardians and the Sanitary Committee. In this polarised society, every local organisation was perceived as on one side or the other, and the fate of the Colchester society, founded in 1850, seems to bear this out. The new body never really got off the ground and it was only in 1852 when a new society for the whole county was proposed, with the support of the local gentry, that a local antiquarian society really began to flourish. The allegiance of the new body was clear. The initial planning meeting was held in the library of Rev. Round, who had opposed the town museum and whose brother, Charles Round, owned the castle building. Half of those present were Anglican ministers. The rules of the new society stipulated that the vice presidents should be noblemen and Members of Parliament, and that the Bishop and Lord Lieutenant were to be patrons. County men dominated the proceedings. Two of the most active members were Rev. Marsden and Richard Neville, the Fourth Lord Braybrook. Both men were typical of the old style antiquarian, with money and leisure, leaving them free to follow other pursuits. In addition, they both had links with other organisations of the ruling group – in Marsden's case to Cambridge University and in Braybrook's, to the House of Lords. It is quite clear that William Wire, working man, Chartist sympathiser and dissenter, would not fit into the new body

It is probable that the necessity to earn a living interfered with Wire's ability to manage the original Colchester society. But this does not explain what appears to

have been his almost total exclusion from the new body. Wire was quite sure that it was his lack of the usual attributes of a gentleman, namely, money and a classical education, that had made him the outsider, even though he was frequently better informed than those who excluded him. Petty personal jealousies were doubtless a part of the explanation. But if a longer-term view is taken and the disagreements are put into the wider context of the fractured and troubled society of Colchester in the middle years of the nineteenth century, then these events would appear to be a good example of group interests protecting their position. It is interesting to speculate whether the relatively more cohesive society in Chester would have been able to assimilate this intelligent and knowledgeable man without regarding him as a threat. But it is probable that Wire was just too different in too many ways to be easily assimilated into any group organised by the ruling interest.

On the other hand, Edward Lee, in Caerleon, is an example of an individual who, while differing in several significant ways from the usual membership of antiquarian societies, was none-the-less both accepted and a pivotal figure in the Caerleon association. This was due in part to the manner in which he chose to present himself. It was also a consequence of the differences between the social context in South Wales and those in the other three areas in my study. After a visit to Caerleon in 1856, Alfred Lord Tennyson described the town as “a most quiet, half ruined village”, and described Lee as “a landed proprietor”.<sup>23</sup> But appearances can be deceptive and his descriptions were inaccurate in both cases.

Although Caerleon was little more than a village, its close proximity to the expanding and prosperous communities in the east Gwent valleys and the sea at Newport, meant that its apparently rural appearance was misleading. With the exception of Sir Digby Mackworth and some Anglican ministers, most of the C.A.A.’s committee members had links with this industrial activity. There were the owners of the two local tinsplate works, John Jenkins and John Butler and a railway surveyor Francis Fox. Octavius Morgan, despite his antiquarian tastes and close association with the leading families, owed his income and lifestyle to the Tredegar estate’s domination of the transport routes through which coal was

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<sup>23</sup> Tennyson letters to his wife 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> September 1856 (1987).



shipped to the world. Lee himself was a partner in a large nail works in Newport, as was another committee member, Frederick Mitchell.<sup>24</sup> These were not men living in a rural backwater, passing the time with antiquarian enquiry. They were closely involved with those very forces of innovation and technology which in other parts of the country were seen as threatening an old way of life. But although they were involved in economic changes, they did share many of the social characteristics of antiquarian leaders in other, more conservative, areas, such as Chester and Cirencester. They were wealthy and closely connected through a network of overlapping community interests and responsibilities. They were also largely long-established in their respective localities, and members of the Anglican Church.

Lee, as a man from outside the locality, and a dissenter, could have appeared as an a potential threat. The fact that he was accepted was due, at least in part, to the manner in which he chose to present himself. He came to Newport in 1841 in order to become a partner in the nail works. He invested a considerable sum of money in the business, but he was not to be a sleeping partner for the agreement between the him and the owner, J.J. Cordes, stipulated that they would run the business together.<sup>25</sup> Cordes' large house overlooked the works in Newport, but Lee evidently did not want to identify himself so closely with the place in which he worked. He chose, instead, to live in Caerleon, several miles away, in a large house, where he could live the life of a gentleman. In many respects, Lee would appear to illustrate the attributes of a 'Gentleman of Science' as described by Thackray and Morrell in their study of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (B.A.A.S.). They note that the first generation of industrial entrepreneurs were not from, and were not interested in joining the landed gentry. But by the 1840s "industrialists of the second and third generation" were more interested in joining these elites.<sup>26</sup> In the face of civil unrest at home and reports of revolution abroad, they sought reassurance and support by associating

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<sup>24</sup> Mitchell joined the C.A.A. committee in 1854 and his son, F.J. Mitchell became joint secretary with Lee in 1871.

<sup>25</sup> The agreement dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 1841 is in the Gwent R.O. (D 169.000). It was to be the subject of some dispute between the Cordes family and Lee in the 1850s.

<sup>26</sup> Thackray & Morrell (1981) p.14.

themselves with authority. Lee had already experienced the way in which outsiders could be assimilated through his early contact with the B.A.A.S. and, in particular, through his friendship with its first secretary, John Phillips.<sup>27</sup> His acceptance and apparently easy assimilation into the Caerleon society is an example of the factors which Thackray and Morrell describe, here at work in an antiquarian setting.

Another, and in many ways more powerful illustration of the complex relationship between archaeological knowledge and discoveries, on the one hand, and the traditional social order on the other, is to be found in Cirencester. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, one of the most striking features of archaeological activity in Cirencester was the failure to establish a society to act as a focus for that activity. Despite the huge interest created by the discovery of the mosaics in 1849, I found no suggestion by anybody in Cirencester that such a society should be formed. This is even more remarkable in view of the large numbers of such societies created throughout the country in both urban and rural areas. It might have been supposed that the very striking nature of the discoveries – well preserved mosaics – would be enough in itself to prompt a typical response, namely the creation of a group to ensure their preservation. I think there are two factors that could help to explain why this did not happen. One was the very traditional nature of the town's social structure and the other was the particularly rich nature of the artefacts themselves. The presence of these two factors and the manner in which they became inter-related helped to ensure that no society would emerge.

In Caerleon, the energy and enthusiasm of Edward Lee had brought about the formation of a group comprising the leading citizens of the town. Together they had raised funds to build a museum in which to house the relics of the town's past. Its name, the Caerleon Museum of Antiquities, and the building's grand classical style, symbolised the group's hopes that, in the words of Sir Digby Mackworth, "this building would be the first step in restoring the town to its ancient importance."<sup>28</sup> As a leading local citizen he was proclaiming not only his own, but

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<sup>27</sup> Phillips was a self-made man who had used his contacts with the BAAS to further his career as a professional geologist. The two men remained friends and probably travelled together in Italy in 1869. Phillips wrote an article on the relationship between archaeology and geology in A.J. Vol. XI (1853).

<sup>28</sup> M.M. 24<sup>th</sup> June 1848.



the group's pride in their town and their belief that its reputation could only be enhanced by a reminder of its previous greatness. In fact, the museum's collection comprised a large number of small articles, none of which on their own was particularly striking, but, when taken together, indicated that the town had been a considerable centre of Roman activity. The whole exercise had served to underline local pride and local ownership of Caerleon's past.

In many respects, the situation in Cirencester was quite the opposite, and the differences between the two towns help to explain the absence of group activity there. As in Caerleon, it was an outsider who took a leading role in preserving the remains of the Roman past. When the mosaics were discovered, John Buckman had organised the local effort to assist in clearing the debris and lifting them out of the ground. But it was at this point that the local magnate, Lord Bathurst, made his offer to pay for the mosaics' preservation and to build a museum in which to house them. In effect, he took them over and claimed them as his own. This ownership was underlined when the mosaics were eventually put on display in 'The Bathurst Museum', built on Bathurst land and the building itself forming a part of the wall which surrounded the estate, maintaining a boundary between estate and town. This represented more than the Lord of the Manor playing a leading role, as was the case in Caerleon, where Digby Mackworth was also the owner of the Manor. This was a pre-modern society making a last stand and asserting a right of ownership, excluding all other possible contenders. It was a response which was quite different from the conservative, but non-the-less modern responses elsewhere, for instance in Colchester.<sup>29</sup>

The Bathurst family had dominated the town since they had bought the estate in the sixteenth century. They owned almost all the land and the patronage of all local positions was in their gift. The offer to provide a museum for the pavements, although universally proclaimed as 'generous', had the effect of ensuring that the Bathurst name was perceived as being synonymous with the Roman past of the town. As already stated, this helps to explain the reluctance on the part of many

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<sup>29</sup> Thanks to Neville Morley for pointing this out. A similar situation was to be seen in Cardiff, where Lord Bute's reluctance to let go of his quasi-feudal powers led to battles between Bute and the emerging corporation. (See Fraser (1979) p.162)

local people to donate their finds to the museum. The creation of the rival Cripps museum to house the artefacts found on the basilica site, was only the most extreme example of this general reluctance. This apparent unwillingness to donate objects to the museum in Cirencester is unusual. In Colchester and Caerleon, where local museums had been established at approximately the same time, collectors appeared eager to donate objects to a local collection. Indeed in Chester, the eagerness to give artefacts outstripped the Society's ability to house them and provided the committee with a problem.

The Bathurst dominance is evident from a report in the Archaeological Journal. Charles Newmarch told the Institute of the recent discoveries of the mosaics in Dyer Street. "Mr. Newmarch warmly eulogised the liberality of Earl Bathurst, who had determined to erect forthwith a museum, for the secure reception of these remains discovered on his property. Mr. Morgan [Octavius Morgan of the Caerleon Association] proposed cordial thanks to the noble proprietor of the ancient Corinium."<sup>30</sup> Even bearing in mind the rather effusive style in which these journal articles were written, it is not difficult to understand how Bathurst and the mosaics came to be linked together in the minds of those concerned. It was as though the intervening centuries had collapsed and Bathurst was the chief citizen of the Roman town.

Bathurst's willingness to provide for the mosaics would seem to indicate more than a desire to claim what he quite clearly regarded as his property. It can only be speculation, but it is possible that it was the very nature of the artefacts concerned that made him willing to go to the expense of erecting a purpose-built museum, bearing his name, in which to house them. The mosaics were remarkably well preserved, as can still be seen in the Corinium museum today. They were colourful, stylish and beautiful examples of classical art, redolent of wealth and a luxurious way of life. As such they appealed to a traditional appreciation of works of classical art that had been held up as the ultimate achievement to which later ages could only hope to aspire. All these were features with which the old ruling order had sought to associate itself as indicative of social position. I surmise that if

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<sup>30</sup> A.J. Vol. VI (1849) p.396.



the work in Dyer Street had unearthed a large cache of more mundane artefacts, it is quite possible that Lord Bathurst would not have been so eager to claim them and house them. The value of the mosaics lay as much in the associations they suggested in the present as they did in the information they conveyed about the past.

If he had wanted to start a local society, Buckman, an outsider, might have been in a better position to act as the catalyst for group activity than if he had always been subject to the restraints imposed by feudal Cirencester. He was interested in further excavation and appealed through the archaeological journals for financial support to carry on. It is also quite probable that he wrote Remains of Roman Art to raise money for the same purpose. But none of these efforts elicited any organised support, as they had done in Caerleon and, to a lesser extent, in Colchester. Clearly, the dominance of the Bathurst interest was one factor in this situation, but Buckman himself was another. He did not share the attributes that would have marked him out as a natural member of the ruling order. In fact to the contrary, rather than studying the classics at Oxford or Cambridge, he had been trained in the natural sciences and was attempting to make his way in the world as a professional scientist. He would almost undoubtedly have felt more at ease in the company of fellow natural scientists in the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club than in a more conventional antiquarian group. It is noticeable that his book's references to the artistic merits of the mosaics are, in fact, quotations from traditional authorities, such as the artist Richard Westmacott. Buckman's emphasis on the physical properties of the mosaics, rather than on the classical allusions they depict, would seem to support this view.

Like others in the same position, Buckman needed to find support and paid employment, and in the 1840s and 1850s patronage still played an important part in such attempts. I have found no references to the nature of the relationship between Lord Bathurst and Buckman. But bearing in mind that Bathurst chose all subsequent curators of the museum, I think it highly unlikely that he would have sanctioned Buckman in the post if he had not approved of him. In other words, even had he wanted to do so, it was not in Buckman's interest to pose a challenge to Bathurst's authority. Buckman was forced to resign his professorship at the college in 1863. The new principal, in his desire to change the ethos of the college

to that more closely resembling the traditional centres of education, forced the resignation of many of the professors. It is ironic that someone who played such a significant part in revealing Cirencester's Roman past, should lose his professional job as a scientist because he lacked a formal classical education.<sup>31</sup>

### Exclusion

I have been looking at the way in which group activity confirmed the position of ruling groups within their local communities. Common outlook and shared activities allowed the members to feel secure, even when the boundaries of society appeared to be shifting. I have suggested that one way in which this process operated was to allow socially aspiring individuals to be assimilated into the group. But this was only possible if the ambitious 'would be' member was not too different from the majority and was prepared to accept most group norms. Those like William Wire, who differed in too many aspects, were excluded. Problems could also be created if there were so many aspiring outsiders that to allow them entrance would significantly alter the nature of the group itself. If that happened, it could be unclear as to who was assimilating whom. In this section I examine the ways in which potentially disruptive individuals were excluded from the exclusive archaeological world. To do so it will be necessary to take into account some events at the centre, in London, because it was through national activities that some of these 'misfit' individuals sought to gain recognition and support from like minded others.

When the B.A.A. was founded in 1843, many people saw the new body as a response to the numerous criticisms levelled at the existing national antiquarian body, the London Society of Antiquaries. The society had become increasingly moribund, there were few papers for the meetings, it appeared unmoved by the threat to ancient monuments and the membership policy was seen by many as unnecessarily exclusive. It was typical of the society's approach that, despite their extensive archaeological activity, both Roach Smith and Wright experienced difficulty in gaining membership. Roach Smith observed of Wright's application, "he was never encouraged; and his contributions were accepted more as favours

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<sup>31</sup> Buckman (1863) Sayce (1992) pp.59-60.



conferred on him than as a credit and honour to the society.” And Smith’s own nomination in 1836 was objected to on the grounds that he was ‘in business’.<sup>32</sup>

The first volume of the A.J. in 1844 carried an article in which the author, W. Jerdan, talked about the ways in which he thought the B.A.A. should develop. He stressed the need to include all those who were interested in the past. “Science and literature are the only true republics impervious to ‘class’ doubt or censure... The simple fact of being devoted to pursuits of this description, ought to be admitted as proof of intellectual ability and respectability, which should make the candidate, lowest perhaps in the gifts of station and fortune, an eligible associate for the most exalted in rank and the most powerful in wealth.” He hoped that such a body would foster good relations in which, “peers would have no dislike to meeting with well-informed husbandmen, nor the heads of the church with the unassuming lay-brother.”<sup>33</sup>

Jerdan’s comments suggest that at least some of the original founders of the B.A.A. were anxious to create a body in which such distinctions of class and wealth would not constitute a barrier to membership. But it soon became apparent that this view was not shared by all. The B.A.A. was becoming irrevocably split over one of the issues that defined the opposing points of view concerning the manner in which antiquarian pursuits could, or should be carried forward, namely amateur status. As I remarked earlier, antiquarianism had been regarded as essentially an amateur pursuit, carried on by men of independent means, wealth and leisure. To allow that individuals differing widely from this description were to be given the official status of membership of antiquarian bodies was to strike a blow against the class interests that underpinned such bodies. And that is precisely what one of the founding members, Thomas Wright, was believed by some to be doing.

In an earlier chapter, I described the arguments that ultimately led to a split in B.A.A. The row between the ‘Way’ faction and the ‘Wright’ faction brought to the surface deeply held differences of opinion concerning the nature of the new body.

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<sup>32</sup> A.J. Vol. I (1844) p.1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.298.

Views became polarised between those who supported Wright (and by implication all those who did not fit the organisations' idea of a 'leisured gentleman') and those, like Way, who felt that archaeology should remain an amateur activity, carried out by gentlemen. In the ensuing row the opposition to Wright was supported by several national journals, including The Gentleman's Magazine and The Athenaeum. An article in the latter stated, "It was high time for the 'better spirits' of the council to look ahead, and see that they did not lend their names a second time to the traders associated with them... The Treasurer must be a man of business habits... The Secretaries must be disinterested men, of name and standing... who can write good English, and speak it correctly when it was written."<sup>34</sup> In his memoirs, the publisher J.H. Parker, supported the notion that this was essentially a dispute about class differences. He wrote, "The Society consisted of two distinct classes of persons – the one, gentlemen of property and amateurs of Archaeology, who wished to have the opportunities of communicating to others the information they had collected, that it might not die with them, as had frequently been the case with many of their friends. The other party consisted of professional archaeologists."<sup>35</sup>

These different views were reflected in the differing attitudes taken towards the choice of subject matter deemed appropriate for study. The report of the Association's first congress in The Athenaeum expressed a traditional view that valued examples of classical art over other more mundane artefacts, and saw Romano-British artefacts as inferior to those produced in Rome itself. "A careful survey of Roman remains in Britain will add little or nothing to our stock book of architectural models; and the remains of Roman sculpture in Britain are in the very worst of taste of expiring and degraded art."<sup>36</sup> Another B.A.A. member, Alfred Dunkin, rebutted these arguments, stressing that all evidence was of value if a full understanding of the life of the past was to be achieved. "The true antiquary does not confine his researches to one single branch of archaeology; but in a comprehensive view surveys every fact; and aims to bring in every object to serve

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<sup>34</sup> The Athenaeum 1<sup>st</sup> March 1845.

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Wetherall (1994) p.17. It is necessary to treat Parker's use of the word 'professional' with some caution. I will return to this point later.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Roach Smith (1883) pp.11-12.



the great end and purpose of a knowledge of man and his habits and customs in past ages.”<sup>37</sup> As these passages demonstrate, there were not only major social differences between the two groups, but also a different basic interpretation as to what constituted the subject matter of archaeology.

The row could not be settled and culminated in a split. Those who favoured the more traditional approach broke away, taking with them The Archaeological Journal, and formed the Archaeological Institute. The membership of the Institute gives some indication of the type of person opposed to the inclusion of a wider membership. It included several Cathedral Deans, Masters of Oxford and Cambridge colleges and hundreds of Church of England clergy. The President was the Marquis of Northampton, who was also president of the Royal Society. It was indeed a representative cross-section of ‘the great and the good’: men who exemplified the ruling groups in society and who might have felt themselves to be threatened by the aspiring middle class.

The B.A.A. retained the rump of the membership, including all the founders who had favoured a wider and more inclusive membership. But Roach Smith complained that the Association was still dominated by “persons of social position and influence who [were] flattered by elevation into the foremost ranks of science and literature.” He complained that the president, Lord Albert Conyngham, had packed the committee with 19 noble patrons, “with the best of intentions and under the belief that it would counterbalance the clerical banners of the Institute. But I have ever considered it a blemish upon English scientific, literary, and artistic institutions that they should have so little self-dependence as to feel it necessary to place the phantom of patronage over their muster rolls.”<sup>38</sup>

Roach Smith’s comments draw attention to his growing disaffection with all aspects of the organised archaeological groups at both a national and a local level. This was due in part to the usual personality clashes that are a feature of most organisations. In the case of the B.A.A. these were exacerbated by the difficult nature of Thomas Pettigrew, the Association’s Treasurer and a dominant figure

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.38.

throughout this period. Pettigrew's high-handed methods led to the dismissal of the secretary, Thomas Hugo, at a public meeting in 1854. The row was caused by letters Hugo wrote to members in Gwent concerning the Association's proposed excavations at Caerwent. However, other letters written by Hugo to Pettigrew, and fellow committee members, indicate that there was an almost paranoid atmosphere between the members of the ruling body.<sup>39</sup>

It was doubtless events such as these that led Roach Smith to tell William Wire: "I have no great faith in the utility of societies. They elevate the inefficient and science is by their means too often prostituted to mere worldly influence."<sup>40</sup> Roach Smith felt that the social aspects of the local archaeological societies were so pre-eminent that they distracted attention away from archaeological matters. So when he started his excavations at the site of the Roman castrum at Lymne, in 1850, he did so independently of any society. Later he wrote, "at the time I did not notice it; but afterwards I found that my colleagues of the B.A.A. were not altogether pleased with my independent action."<sup>41</sup> He told Wire that the excavation had been very successful. "You see how preferable they are to the indecision and jealousies of societies, that talk and work not."<sup>42</sup>

Disillusioned by the arguments and rivalries, a small group of like-minded outsiders began to emerge. The group was never formalised, there were no committees or rules, but it is clear from letters and other accounts that these men remained in close and constant contact with one another. Apart from Roach Smith and Wright, the core of the group consisted of the illustrator, Frederick Fairholt,

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<sup>39</sup> Letters of Thomas Hugo (1850-1856) are in the British Library. (30296). During this dispute Hugo quoted the *Athenaeum's* description of Pettigrew. "In any public relation he can live comfortably only in an atmosphere of disturbance; and as that is a phenomenon easy to produce, he easily contrives wherever he goes to create the moral condition in which his egotism thrives...Petulance, captiousness and jealousy are still among his characteristics. The concoction of intrigues, the packing of meetings, and the confusion of congresses are his delight. The fomenting of suspicions by misrepresentations to each of his colleagues what the rest are alleged to say in their disparagement...is still his constant habit." Rev. Thomas Hugo, A Letter to the Late Members of the B.A.A. (1855). (Evans(1956) p.254)

<sup>40</sup> Roach Smith to Wire 13<sup>th</sup> February 1851 (Essex Museum Service) The Danish archaeologist Worsaae, who visited England in 1843, told Smith that he had been struck by the disregard shown to men of science. "I have been most kindly received by the highest in the land, because I carried an introduction from the King; but I could not do otherwise than observe that men of the greatest eminence in science, were left quite unnoticed." (Roach Smith (1886) p.154).

<sup>41</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.209.

<sup>42</sup> Roach Smith to Wire 20<sup>th</sup> October 1852.



the gentleman farmer and the curator of the Saffron Walden Museum, Joseph Clarke, and a Liverpool goldsmith and jeweller, Joseph Mayer. In addition, there were several others who were connected more loosely, such as the London antique dealer, William Chaffer and the antiquarians and collectors, William Wylie and William Rolfe.<sup>43</sup> The railway enabled them to travel around the country to visit sites and examine collections, frequently in each other's company and when this was not possible they wrote vast numbers of letters. They were united by an interest in the past, generally, and archaeology in particular. But the clearest link between them was that they did not fit easily into the organised archaeological bodies. In the case of Fairholt, this was because he was a relatively poor working man, with a background that set him apart from the traditional rulers in society. Joseph Mayer, on the other hand, although he was anxious to be accepted by the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, appears to have remained something of an outsider, possibly because of his association with Roach Smith and a lingering whiff of 'trade'.<sup>44</sup>

One example of the way in which this informal network was linked through a myriad of interconnections is to be found in the events surrounding Mayer's acquisition of the Faussett Collection, in 1854. In spite of a huge outcry in archaeological circles, the British Museum Trustees had refused to buy the collection. Eventually Mayer bought it for his own museum in Liverpool, with Roach Smith and Chaffer acting as the intermediaries with the Faussett family. Mayer then commissioned Roach Smith to write a catalogue for the collection, which was published in 1856 as Inventorium Sepulchrale, with illustrations drawn by Fairholt. Mayer was widely praised for his rescue of the collection by, among many others, Joseph Clarke and Wright.<sup>45</sup> In 1854, Wright was invited by Mayer to give a lecture, based on the collection, to a joint meeting of the B.A.A.S. and the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire in Liverpool. Finally, a friend of

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<sup>43</sup> Chaffers was a leading London dealer who specialised in Roman antiquities and coins. Wylie was a wealthy landowner who excavated Anglo-Saxon graves in Oxfordshire. Rolfe was a farmer whose excavations at Richborough in Kent were financed by Mayer. I will examine the collections of these men in the next chapter. Wire was on the edge of this group, courtesy of his friendship with Roach Smith.

<sup>44</sup> Mayer was the librarian for the Lancashire Society. But his main role in British archaeology was the financial help he gave Smith and Wright for their excavations at Lymne and Wroxeter, and his willingness to buy collections threatened by dispersal. See White (1988).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p.121.

Clarke's, from Saffron Walden, Eckroyd Smith, was introduced to Mayer and became the curator of his museum in Liverpool.<sup>46</sup>

Correspondence between Roach Smith and Clarke gives some idea of the group's dislike of the way in which the traditional holders of authority dominated all organisations, not just archaeological societies. When Mayer offered some of his extensive collection for display in the Art Treasures Exhibition held in Manchester in 1857, he was only offered one case in which to display them. This infuriated Clarke, who told Roach Smith, "Here are a parcel of snobs and charlatans at the head of affairs in Manchester whose vocation it occurs to be to cringe and toady to the great."<sup>47</sup> Clarke was equally scathing about Richard Neville's excavations at Great Chesterford. He thought the sites had been left partially abandoned and therefore he had gone to rescue what he could, "as anybody takes away whatever they may fancy. All I have picked up, but I did not start soon enough." And in another letter, Clarke described one of the outings of the Essex Society as "mere parties of pleasure".<sup>48</sup> Their dislike was compounded and possibly justified, by what they regarded as the societies' unwillingness to give proper weight to the importance of archaeological work. Roach Smith alluded to this when he described the difficulties involved in financing the publication of the results of his excavation at Lymne. "It is necessary that the result of researches be printed and properly illustrated; and this can hardly be done when the councils of societies are composed as they usually are, of gentlemen who do not feel the importance of any historical antiquities what so ever."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Wright had considerable difficulty raising the money for his excavations of the Roman remains of Uriconium and was only able to proceed because of financial help from Mayer.

With hindsight, it is possible to see the activities and thoughts of this disaffected group as evidence of a much wider struggle that was going on in many aspects of intellectual life of the period. In effect, the struggle was between traditional

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<sup>46</sup> Henry Eckroyd Smith was an antiquarian. He wrote *Reliquiae Insuriana* (1851) on the Roman town at Aldborough. He was a skilled draughtsman and his book of lithographs of Roman tessellated pavements was published in 1850. He was the curator of Mayer's museum from 1852-1870.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in White (1988) p.133.

<sup>48</sup> Undated letters from Clarke to Roach Smith. (Saffron Walden Museum, drawer 4.)

<sup>49</sup> Roach Smith (1852) p.vi



authority with its associated belief systems and those newcomers who sought to contest this authority through the creation of new institutions and using new theories of knowledge. But the dilemma for the middle class challengers was that while they sought recognition for themselves and their ideas, they did not want to totally disrupt the old order, merely to alter it sufficiently to gain admittance. Most of the work in this area has identified professionalisation as a major factor in this process.

### Professionalisation

James Moore has described the process of professionalisation in the Victorian period as “the high road to power and authority among bourgeois intellectuals.”<sup>50</sup> Moore’s view that it was the mechanism that allowed the new men and new beliefs to acquire legitimacy and respect has been supported by many other studies.<sup>51</sup> It is important to recognise, however, that when people of the period talk of ‘professional’, (for instance Parker quoted above) they do not necessarily mean what modern usage would lead us to think. As Morrell has pointed out. “The notion of a profession has never been static. On the contrary, it has changed drastically over time; it has been a social semantic construct.”<sup>52</sup>

If the opportunity to earn a living through activities associated with a particular subject area is assumed to be central to the term, then archaeology and history offered very few openings to the would be professional. There was still a general view that antiquarianism was the pursuit of gentlemen and was a virtue in itself. Thomas Pettigrew, in a speech to the B.A.A. in 1850. declared that, “no officer of this society receives a salary... that with us, the love of the pursuit beguiles all the labour of it.”<sup>53</sup> Roach Smith opposed salaried positions for national societies like the Numismatic Society or a possible government commission, on the grounds that, “I am also too well aware of how things are ‘jobbed’ in England ever to expect

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<sup>50</sup> Moore (1990) p.154

<sup>51</sup> For instance, Porter (1978) pp.809-836; Turner (1978) pp.171-201; Jann (1983) pp.122-147; Morrell (1990) pp.980-989.

<sup>52</sup> Morrell (1990) p.980.

<sup>53</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. VI (1850) p.166. Pettigrew was justifying the fact that the B.A.A was not able to finance excavations.

being recognised in the event of the appointment of a Commission of Monuments. The persons appointed would be people of influence.”<sup>54</sup>

John Akerman, the man responsible for the excavations at Caerwent, was one of the few individuals who managed to earn a living through his antiquarian activities. In his early life he had a series of jobs as secretary to among others, William Cobbett, the Greenwich Railway Company and Lord Albert Conyngham, the first president of the British Archaeological Association. In 1848 he became the joint secretary to the London Society of Antiquaries and editor of their journal Archaeologia, a post he held until his retirement in 1860.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Wright was another contender for the secretaryship of the Antiquaries in 1848, but he withdrew his application on the grounds that he did not wish to cause any dissent or divisions within the society. Doubtless he was mindful of their reluctance to make him a member and of the split in the B.A.A. caused by his literary activities. Both men managed to earn a living through their writing and administration of various societies, but it was a tenuous existence, and they were both reliant, to some extent, on the patronage of wealthy gentlemen.<sup>56</sup>

Paid employment was offered in the Central Record Office and in the Historical Manuscripts Commission, both of which were concerned with the textual evidence of the past. The material evidence that played so large a part in the antiquarians' interests still did not figure in any government institutions. University departments continued to be dominated by amateurs. The first Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge was a minister, Rev. Marsden, and another minister, Charles Kingsley, was Professor of History during the 1860s. It was not until much later in the century that a chair of classical archaeology was created at Oxford, and pre-historic archaeology was not taught until the twentieth century. Furthermore, the traditional dominance of the classical world in historical and archaeological studies was probably an important factor in the tendency of practical archaeologists to

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<sup>54</sup> Roach Smith letter to Worsaae, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1848. Cited in Rhodes (1993) p.215.

<sup>55</sup> In 1848 Akerman's received £100 a year and the use of furnished rooms. He was expected to be in the library for two hours a day throughout the year. He managed to combine these duties with the post of secretary to Conyngham. The salary was increased to £200 when he became the only secretary in 1855 and £250 when he took over the editorship of *Archaeologia* in 1858.

<sup>56</sup> Wright's work was subsidised by Mayer. Lord Albert Conyngham, the B.A.A.'s first president funded Akerman's Anglo Saxon excavations.



identify themselves with ethnography, rather than the older subject areas. This was partly a function of the way in which they chose to define their studies, but it might also have been because they felt it would be easier to be accepted in the more scientific discipline of ethnology.<sup>57</sup>

If the opportunities for professional development at a national level were only gradually being created, there was an almost complete absence of such developments at the local level. Local activity continued to be dominated by representatives of the ruling group, either acting alone or, more usually, together through a local society. Indeed Levine has argued that it was not until the early twentieth century that the activities of local groups became marginalised by the development of professions in the historical and archaeological spheres nationally. The only paid employment offered locally was in connection with the collections and museums. The Caerleon group decided to appoint a museum keeper at a fee of not more than three guineas a year.<sup>58</sup> During the excavation at the Caerwent site in 1855, a tessellated pavement was uncovered and the committee agreed to pay for an accurate drawing to be made and for the lifting of the pavement. The work cost £34, but this was only a one off payment.<sup>59</sup> The Chester society was more ambitious. The minutes record that Mr. Bellars was paid for, “occasional services in sketching lithographs for the journal and that he should be employed for one week only at a fee of two guineas to arrange the books, coins and other property of the society.”<sup>60</sup> In 1855, Bellars was being employed jointly by the society and the city library to work five hours a day in the library and reading room. In 1857 the minutes record, “Mr. Taylor, the present keeper of the city news room to be employed as curator, librarian and general officer at the salary of eight pounds a year.”<sup>61</sup> The Essex society was the only one to appoint a full time curator. In

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<sup>57</sup> For instance Pitt Rivers was president of the Ethnology Society. The G.M. reported the discussions of the ethnological section of the B.A.A.S. under ‘Antiquarian Researches’. In 1854 Wright told a meeting of the ethnological section that “The proper and only correct arrangement of a museum of antiquities was an ethnological one.” (GM July-December 1854, p.601) This was consistent with his opposition to the Danish three-age system. See Wright (1854) preface.

<sup>58</sup> C.A.A. Minutes 21<sup>st</sup> August 1850. The 1863 membership list records the keeper, Mr. Powell, living at the post office, presumably his main employment.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 16<sup>th</sup> August 1855 and 5<sup>th</sup> August 1856.

<sup>60</sup> C.A.A.H.S. Minutes 24<sup>th</sup> March 1854.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 21<sup>st</sup> May 1857.

collaboration with the local authority it was decided that the pay should be £35-a-year, of which the society would pay £5. Whoever was appointed was judged insufficiently knowledgeable to produce a catalogue, because the society decided to pay William Chaffer, the London dealer, £21 to catalogue and arrange the collections.<sup>62</sup> In the light of this local evidence, anyone aspiring to earn a living through study of the past would have been advised to gravitate towards the centre of activities in London, where the British Museum and the national societies did at least offer some chance of employment.

If professionalism is defined more widely to include notions of standards and specialist knowledge, then the number of those who could be so described would be greater. It would include, for instance, several members of the dissident group around Roach Smith. It is doubtful whether any of them would have referred to themselves as professional, but their expert knowledge and insistence on the importance of systematic recording and publication of results provide a stark contrast to the more cavalier methods of many amateurs in the local societies. Above all, these individuals placed a greater value on knowledge of their subject area than they did on social position. Clearly this set them at odds with the often unspoken social values underpinning most of the local groups. In such a situation they had more in common with each other and it is probably most useful to regard their activities as representing an early stage in the progression from amateur to professional status in archaeology.<sup>63</sup>

### *Archaeology and the Working Man*

One paradox about archaeology in this period is that although the activists, writers of books and members of societies, were almost entirely middle and upper class, the individuals who actually found most of the artefacts in the first place were working men on building sites. So how did the archaeologists regard these people who were so necessary, but who hardly conformed to the social conventions underlying the societies?

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<sup>62</sup> E.A.S. Minutes 10<sup>th</sup> August 1860 and 13<sup>th</sup> February 1862.

<sup>63</sup> Francis Haverfield, who carried out extensive excavations in Cirencester in the early twentieth century, described nineteenth century archaeology of Roman Britain as "The playground of the amateur...the man, who whatever his abilities had had no training at all." Cited in Levine (1986) p.98.



As Jerdan's article suggests, there was some lip-service paid to the idea that a genuine interest in the past should be the only qualification necessary for membership of the new national body (the B.A.A.). However, as I have already stressed earlier in this chapter, all the local societies were composed of members of the ruling groups in their areas and as such were unlikely to prove particularly welcoming to those outside the group, as Wire experienced in Colchester. But despite the evidence of Wire, there were at least two factors that ensured that the working man could not be ignored entirely. First was the need to ensure that the labourers who uncovered artefacts did not destroy them through ignorance. Second was the Victorian urge to 'improve' the working man. In some ways these overlapped and the need for the former justified the latter.

The destruction of artefacts and sites of archaeological interest that had prompted the creation of the B.A.A. in 1843 was due to several factors, including the ignorance of the workmen. A B.A.A. representative in Leicester pointed out the difficulties. "Here is another sin of archaeologists and antiquaries... they are too generally anti-movement men, as regards the civilization of the masses, and they are well punished for it. If we loved such things with the right sort of love, and not merely as something exclusive and *recherché* and as elevating us above the *profanum vulgus*, we should, through very horror of their destructive powers and opportunities, overflow with affection to the diggers and delvers of the earth, and every broad-cloth member at our sittings would have a fustian member at his side, and cherishing him tenderly as the very apple of his eye, and never be satisfied till he had indoctrinated him up to his own standard."<sup>64</sup> But as the disputes concerning the ownership of antiquities from the town hall site in Colchester revealed, love of the artefacts alone was not the only or even the chief motive of those who sought to find them. It was a situation in which no one's motives was totally straightforward. Certainly the workmen on the town hall site were aware of the artefacts' value, if only prompted by the zeal of the city fathers (and others) to buy them. The antiquarians spoke of a danger that they could be lost to the town. But even Wire was a trader who would sell the artefacts to collectors elsewhere. More basic still, the use of classical associations as the means whereby individuals could define

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<sup>64</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.I (1844) p.259.

themselves as part of an elite was too strongly entrenched to allow the 'diggers and delvers' into the charmed circle.

There seems to have been very little attempt to educate the workmen directly, possibly because of the fear that they would use such knowledge to their own financial advantage. There was little encouragement for working men to join the societies and thus acquire some knowledge and a sense of local pride. The Chester Society did have a separate low membership fee for artisans and their journal stated that, "workmen have been liberally encouraged to save relics, which would otherwise have been broken up or lost."<sup>65</sup> But few working people took advantage of this. Many of the meetings were held during the day and the excursions that figured so prominently in activities, involved expenditure on railway tickets and meals, all of which would deter those with any sort of regular employment or on low incomes. William Wire complained to Roach Smith that he felt cold-shouldered by other antiquarians because "my circumstances will not permit me to feed them well." Indeed the very social nature of the outings will have tended to emphasise the exclusive nature of the societies. As Wire complained, "those who were once kind to me, are now as distanced as possible, as they can be asked to luncheon and breakfast at the houses of the great ones."<sup>66</sup>

Instead of attempting to involve working people in the archaeological societies, many of the leading members were involved in the creation of other organisations whose aim was to improve 'artisans' and 'operatives'. At the forefront of this activity was the creation of Mechanics' Institutes, a movement that spread rapidly after the 1832 Reform Act. Institutes were formed in Colchester in 1833, in Chester in 1835, in Newport in 1841, and in Cirencester in 1844. Typically an institute would consist of a library and a reading room and would provide a range of lectures on scientific and literary topics. The Colchester Institute's prospectus stated that "it is to the mechanics of Colchester that the Institution looks principally." To this end, half the committee places were reserved for working men and the fees were comparatively low, at two shillings a quarter.<sup>67</sup> But

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<sup>65</sup> C.A.A.H.S.J. (1858) preface.

<sup>66</sup> Wire letters to Roach Smith, 20<sup>th</sup> February 1852 and 21<sup>st</sup> August 1851.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in Brown (1980) p.69



according to the Essex Standard it “has failed to reach the masses of the working class.” It was finally disbanded in 1860.<sup>68</sup> The relative failure of the Institute in Colchester was typical. In Newport, where Francis Fox was a vice president and both Lee and Mitchell were subscribers, the annual report in 1850 expressed surprise that so few mechanics and operatives were involved. “Motives of private interest, if from no higher, should eagerly embrace the opportunity it affords of preparing themselves to maintain a fitting status in society and of rendering themselves proof against those evils and misfortunes which ignorance and non-advancement infallibly entail.”<sup>69</sup> The failure to attract a working class membership and the consequent change of focus from improvement to entertainment was reflected in the decision to alter the name from Mechanics’ Institute to Athenaeum. The change was symbolic, as it emphasised the traditional associations with classical learning rather than the knowledge required for employment in industry. The decision to start a Newport Workingmen’s Institute in 1851, with a representation of working men on its committee, the free discussion of religious and political issues and Sunday opening, drew attention to the misguided, paternalistic efforts of the Mechanics’ Institute. The picture was much the same in Chester. In his Stranger’s Guide, Thomas Hughes, after describing the many advantages of membership, deplored the lack of interest. “What a marvellous fact it is, that with these benefits within their reach, so few mechanics avail themselves of this, their own institution.”<sup>70</sup>

What Hughes, and the other intended benefactors, seemed not to appreciate was that working people preferred to create their own groups. Some of these, for example the Chartist groups and trade unions, were clearly aimed at improving working conditions and extending the franchise. Given the level of political agitation in the 1840s and the concern this caused to the ruling groups, it is relatively easy to understand the desire on the part of the better off to neutralise such activity. But in such a heightened political atmosphere the motives on both sides were probably regarded with suspicion and this will have affected even those

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Newport Mechanic’s Institute Annual Report 20<sup>th</sup> April 1850. (Newport Reference Library)

<sup>70</sup> Hughes (1856) p.110

apparently non-partisan groups that were aimed at the spread of knowledge and education.<sup>71</sup> Research by Ann Secord into the working class groups set up to study natural history during this period suggests that working people were interested in extending their knowledge and did form informal groups to facilitate their study.<sup>72</sup> But I have found no evidence of comparable groups created to look at the past and its artefacts. This could, of course, be because I have not looked in the right places. But I suspect that the subject matter itself, namely artefacts associated with the classical Roman past in Britain, will have been perceived as being more closely associated with the upper classes and privilege and therefore less appealing, out of bounds even, to working people.

The aspect of the Mechanics' Institutes that was invariably the most successful was the reading room and library. In both Cirencester and Chester, these continued in operation even after the other functions had ceased. There was also a large increase in the number of commercial lending libraries, of which the largest and most-well known was Mudie's in London.<sup>73</sup> Most towns of any size had circulating libraries that were usually attached to the local book publishers. In Cirencester, Messrs Bailey and Jones took over the contents of the library and reading room from the library committee, which had gone into debt in 1847.

The spread of libraries and reading rooms, both institutional and commercial, was an indication of the huge increase in the production of periodicals and cheap books that gathered pace from the 1840s. The introduction of the steam press had allowed the price of books to fall dramatically and had coincided with increasing literacy rates among the population as a whole.<sup>74</sup> According to one observer, "books are

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<sup>71</sup> The stated aims were not the whole agenda on either side. The president of the Cheltenham Literary and Philosophical Society gives some guide to the ulterior motives of the ruling group. "In England and every other country rapidly advancing in civilisation, the greater offences against person, property and state are diminished precisely in proportion that the means of education are enlarged." Dr. Boisragon, Introductory address 25<sup>th</sup> September 1838. (Gloucester Local History Collection) And on the other side, Wire advocating the benefits of Mechanic's Institutes. "Knowledge is power and you can command it. You would also be instructing your children and making yourselves better men for society, and render you worthy of your franchise." (Essex & Suffolk Times 2n<sup>d</sup> March 1838. Cited in Brown (1980) p.113)

<sup>72</sup> Secord (1994a) p.269-315 and (1994b) pp.383-408.

<sup>73</sup> Mudie's was founded in 1843 and expanded rapidly. The firm frequently ordered several thousand copies of new publications, with the result that books, such as Wilkie Collins' No Name (1862) was sold out on day one because of Mudie's pre-publication order.

<sup>74</sup> Altick has calculated that about sixty per cent of the population over twenty was literate in 1851. (Altick (1989) p.143).



everywhere to be obtained at a cheap rate. (People) lived amongst books, and had only to shut their eyes and stretch forth their hands to the shelf, to be put upon learning made easy.”<sup>75</sup> Cheap periodicals such as the Penny Magazine and Chambers Journal covered a vast range of topics, including extracts from Thomas Arnold’s History of Rome.<sup>76</sup> When the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge decided to cease production of the Penny Magazine in 1846 it was stated that the decision had been made because, “the Society’s work is done, for its greatest object is achieved. The public is supplied with cheap and good literature.”<sup>77</sup>

One effect of this huge increase in book production was to make knowledge of the classical past and Roman Britain more widely available. In 1847 the A.J. carried an advertisement for Bohn’s Antiquarian Library that included cheap versions of, among others, Bede’s History, The Anglo Saxon Chronicle, Mallet’s Northern Antiquities and six old English chronicles including Gildas, Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Richard of Cirencester.<sup>78</sup> Thomas Wright reviewed the library in the B.A.A.J. He called it “exceedingly valuable” because these works had been “inaccessible except to the few.” He concluded, “I am sure that no one ever dreamt that he would obtain a complete translation of Bede’s History and the Anglo Saxon Chronicle for five shillings.”<sup>79</sup> In 1849, the publisher Charles Knight, who had produced the Penny Magazine, announced a new periodical, the Imperial Cyclopaedia. A writer in the A.J. welcomed the new publication because it would promote archaeological knowledge among, “A class of people who have very often opportunities of rescuing from destruction interesting relics and memorials, but which are now passed by unheeded, from the absence of any knowledge of their value.”<sup>80</sup> In other words the labourers on the building sites.

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<sup>75</sup> Essex Standard 27<sup>th</sup> October 1848.

<sup>76</sup> Penny Magazine 10<sup>th</sup> February 1844 and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1844.

<sup>77</sup> Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Address 11<sup>th</sup> March 1846.

<sup>78</sup> A.J. Vol. IV (1847) p.379.

<sup>79</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. III (1849) p.362.

<sup>80</sup> A.J. Vol. VI (1849) p.100.

Once again, it is difficult to judge how many working people actually read these cheap versions of the chronicles.

Opinion's vary – Robert Chambers, editor of Chamber's Weekly wrote that “it was read by the elite of the community; those who think, conduct themselves respectably, and are anxious to improve their circumstances by judicious means. But below this worthy order of men, our work, except in a few particular cases, does not go far. A fatal mistake is committed in the notion that the lower classes read...Some millions of adults of both sexes, in cities as well as in rural districts, are till this hour as ignorant of letters as the people were generally during the middle ages.”<sup>81</sup> However, Wilkie Collins wrote about ‘The Unknown Public’ in which he described the book-clubs, circulating libraries, readers of newspapers and reviews as ‘nothing more than a minority’ of the reading public. The majority, according to Collins about three million, read the penny journals that remained untouched and unknown to the minority.<sup>82</sup>

But the numbers of books and periodicals produced and the spread of available lending libraries would suggest that knowledge of the past was being spread wider than ever before. It was no longer the exclusive domain of the rich and powerful with access to a classical education. Books such as Wright's The Celt, the Roman and the Saxon (1852), made available current archaeological knowledge in a form and at a price that allowed a wider audience into what had previously been seen as the exclusive preserve of the leaders of society. Some complained that the result was a less rigorous regard for the subject matter, but as Bulwer-Lytton had written, “People complain of it, as though it were a proof of degeneracy in the knowledge of authors - it is a proof of the increased number of readers.”<sup>83</sup> The spread of knowledge could only result in more people being drawn into the study of the past either as enthusiastic amateurs or as professionals.

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<sup>81</sup> (Chamber's Journal XI (1840) p.8)

<sup>82</sup> (W. Collins, My Miscellanies, 1<sup>st</sup> printed in *Household Words or All the Year Round*, 1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1875, Chatto & Windus, 1893, p.249)

<sup>83</sup> Bulwer-Lytton (1<sup>st</sup> ed.1833. New ed. 1970) Jann has suggested that the attacks on the style of popular history books arose from a fear that they might diminish the authority of would be professionals. There were too few professionals in the mid nineteenth century for this to apply.



Either way, the dominance of the ruling groups was being challenged in just those areas that had been seen as uniquely their own.

## **CHAPTER 9: THE MEANING OF OBJECTS**

At the inaugural meeting of the Essex Archaeological Society in 1852 John Marsden, the Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge, defined archaeology as the study of all the ‘visible and tangible’ relics of man’s work in the past. He pointed out that while these material remains could be “collected, analysed, classified and preserved” they also had an imaginative appeal that could be used by poets to evoke the sympathy of their readers. As both approaches utilised the same relics, Marsden thought that “there is a close connection between the antiquary and the poet; between him who presents to us the airy and unsubstantial creations of his own mind, and him whose occupation is among objects, which he can touch and handle, and pry into, and weigh and measure.”<sup>1</sup>

Where there are no textual accounts, objects are often the only available source of information. But as Marsden’s comments make clear, historical objects can be used in a number of ways. They can be studied as evidence in their own right, or they can be the means by which previously invisible periods and events can be brought into view. The ambiguity created by this apparent ‘dual nature’ of objects arises from the fact that they are both a material reality in the present, while at the same time they represent an aspect of the past. They can be described purely in terms of their physical properties: their material and production, their size, shape and measurement, and usage. And they can be seen as symbols in which their physical presence constitutes only one part of their meaning. The interpretation of objects used in this way will be dependent not only on their location and relation to other objects, but upon the complex mixture of associations they evoke. As a result objects can be given a range of possible meanings and interpretations and their symbolic value can be utilised in historical narratives and also to aid interpretation of contemporary events.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I divide my discussion into two parts: first objects as evidence of the past; and second, the symbolic value of objects in the present. In the first section I consider objects’ physical characteristics, the kind of information they

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. E.A.S Vol.I (1858) p.22

<sup>2</sup> These problems still concern modern archaeologists, see Shanks (1996).



offered, how they were classified, and used for comparisons with other examples from Italy (and in particular from Pompeii). I also examine different museum collections, ownership, their layout and accessibility. Then I discuss the market that was created as a result of the interest in antiquities. In the second section I consider the symbolic significance of artefacts and collections, both for their owners personally and for their influence on their owners social standing. I will consider the particular impact of human remains such as skeletons, skulls and footprints in enabling individuals to relate to the past and the narrative value of objects in imaginative reconstruction and identification. But although I divide the chapter into two, it needs to be stressed that these different aspects of objects and collecting were in fact closely linked and intimately connected with each other at many points.

### The Object

It would appear from some of their comments that it was the very solidity of objects that had such appeal for the early archaeologists. Roach Smith commented that in the void left by the lack of textual evidence objects represented “something tangible, something which the eye can dissect, appropriate and comprehend.”<sup>3</sup> The same desire for hard evidence is apparent in Albert Way’s assertion in 1844 that the main focus of interest of the newly-created British Archaeological Association would be to “address itself to the illustration of tangible things.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, another journal article talked of, “The silence of history... where there is an eloquence in the sculptured fragment or the crumbling walls, the ornaments or appliances of everyday life.”<sup>5</sup> All these comments suggest a common desire to make contact with the past in a concrete and palpable way in order to fill the gaps left by the lack of texts. That is precisely what the physical objects offered. Indeed their very ordinariness could obscure their age, as was the case with a Roman

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<sup>3</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.246.

<sup>4</sup> A.J. Vol. I (1844) p.6.

<sup>5</sup> A.J. Vol. VII (1850) p.97.

shield that had been used as a pot lid and scoured weekly, or the piece of Samian-ware used as a soap dish.<sup>6</sup>

Once in a collection, the objects became available for physical analysis. Edward Lee talked about the difficulty of preserving ivory objects and advocated the use of isinglass, as used by Layard in the excavations at Nineveh. He also turned to non-archaeological experts for assistance. He used a local surgeon to identify the burnt remains of bones in a jar, and a friend with “a lathe and a complete set of tools” to demonstrate the way in which marks on some pottery could have been produced by tools available to the Romans.<sup>7</sup> But probably the most extreme example of the way in which the physical properties of artefacts could be divorced from their context and associations and studied purely as pieces of matter is to be found in the very detailed analysis that John Buckman made of the Cirencester mosaics. He produced a series of articles in which he examined the geological and chemical make up of the tesserae and their colouring. His book, Remains of Roman Art, includes chapters on the materials and construction of the pavements, including an analysis of the ruby glass.<sup>8</sup> But significantly, the only discussion of the pavements’ subject matter is in the form of quotes from the artist, Richard Westmacott.

The desire on the part of some archaeologists to present their subject as a science and their activities as scientific encouraged them to view the artefacts simply as individual physical objects rather than as one part of a wider whole. The very act of transferring them from a site to a collection or to a museum changed their meaning. On the site they remained in context as a part of Romano-British society. Once in a museum they became available for use as examples within a number of different classification systems. Thus, the removal of the Cirencester mosaics to a museum allowed Buckman to approach them as artefacts quite separate from their context of a villa in Romano-British Corinium. As local collections proliferated, some voices were heard questioning the automatic removal of objects from their site. The historian, Edward Freeman, pointed out to the Archaeological Institute in

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<sup>6</sup> The shield was described Augustus Franks in A.J. Vol. XV (1858) p.55. The soap dish in Lee (1862) p.29

<sup>7</sup> Lee (1862) p.46.

<sup>8</sup> Buckman & Newmarch (1850) p.55. Buckman’s articles were in A.J. Vol. VII (1850) p.347 and A.J. Vol. XIII (1856) p.215



1851 that, "The deep interest associated with the monuments was wholly, and in some instances, wantonly sacrificed by the dispersal of their most precious accessories."<sup>9</sup> But in the ensuing discussion, Lord Talbot described the removal of the Elgin Marbles as "perfectly justifiable and expedient."<sup>10</sup>

The study of artefacts as single objects could be useful in a number of ways. They could offer technological solutions to contemporary manufacturers. After giving the chemical analysis of the ruby glass John Buckman concluded, "A correct analytical knowledge might have saved former experimenters much time and trouble and an analysis of Roman ruby glass might have led again to the recovery of the art."<sup>11</sup> Buckman had commented on the possible cross-fertilisation between modern science and archaeology and ancient and modern production in an article in the Archaeological Journal. "My conviction is that the history of the past may provide much elucidation from modern science, and that the science and art of the present may in their turn be greatly advanced by a correct examination and a due appreciation of what has been achieved in ancient times... and may prove of no trifling practical advantage."<sup>12</sup> A review of a new book that illustrated the artefacts found in Pompeii and Herculaneum pointed out that the information it contained would be useful to, "The artificer, the student in the school of design, to all, engaged in the study or the practice of decorative art."<sup>13</sup> A view that was supported by the comments of a locksmith who examined the keys in Roach Smith's museum, "He observed that the principle of his patent keys had evidently been well

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<sup>9</sup> A.J. Vol. VIII (1851) p.362. Kemble's views echoed those of William Gell in his book about the artefacts from Pompeii. "It is much to be regretted that means could not be devised for their preservation on the precise spot at which they were originally found and where locality would have thrown around them an interest which they entirely lose when crowded with other curiosities in the Museum of Portici." (Gell, (1819) p.14)

<sup>10</sup> A.J. Vol. VIII (1851) p.327. Talbot's words draw attention to the highly political nature of archaeological conservation, then and now.

<sup>11</sup> Buckman & Newmarch (1850) p.60.

<sup>12</sup> A.J. Vol. VII (1850) p.353. The use of the mosaics as models for modern manufacture was also pointed out in a review of Buckman's book in the Gentleman's Magazine. (Vol. 34 (1850) p.243)

<sup>13</sup> A.J. Vol. XI (1854) p.89. Review of Edward Trollope, Illustrations of Ancient Art, selected from objects discovered at Pompeii and Herculaneum. The writer emphasises that unlike other books on Pompeii, this one dealt only with objects and not architecture.

understood by the Romans. He had, in fact, simply recovered what had long since been known and forgotten, like very many other supposed modern inventions.”<sup>14</sup>

For the archaeologists, the prime use of the objects was the information they could offer concerning Roman Britain. In 1855, Professor Marsden remarked that, even in the case of ancient Greece, more was known of their politics and religion as a result of archaeological advances than had been gained through the accounts of poets and historians. He compared this with the even scanty textual evidence available in Britain, “The state of Britain under the Romans is now tolerably familiar to us: but we have learned it not from books, but from an investigation of their works, their roads, their houses, their hypocausts, their earthworks, their coins, their ornaments and utensils, their weapons, and the vast multitude of other miscellaneous relics which they have left behind.”<sup>15</sup>

And of these, coins and their inscriptions were particularly valuable as they could be used to date the artefacts found with them. The potential information offered by coins and medals had been recognised for a long time.<sup>16</sup> In 1839, John Akerman founded the Numismatic Society. He also wrote several guides to collecting coins, including Ancient and Modern Coins (1848) and Coins of the Romans Relating to Britain (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1848). Roach Smith became secretary of the society in 1853 and many other local archaeologists were also members. Most books about Romano British sites contained lists of the coins found in the vicinity. Charles Newton, who had spent several years classifying the coin collection in the British Museum, pointed out their value as evidence, “Roman coins are not Fasti, nor are Greek coins a treatise on ancient geography, yet the labour of numismatists has made the one almost the best authority for the chronology of the Roman empire, and has found in the other an inestimable commentary on Strabo and Ptolemy.”<sup>17</sup> John

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<sup>14</sup> Roach Smith (1854) p.71

<sup>15</sup> A.J. Vol. XII (1855) p.2.

<sup>16</sup> Lord Bathurst quoted Joseph Addison’s Dialogue on Medals (1700) to the Congress of the B.A.A. in 1869. (See B.A.A.J. Vol. XXV (1869) p.23) However the evidence from coins could be mis-interpreted. In a lecture on the Faussett collection, Wright pointed out that Faussett had wrongly attributed the graves to the Roman period because of the coins found in the graves. “He concluded very hastily that the date of their deposit must have the reign in which they were struck.” (Trans. Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol. VII (1855) p.1).

<sup>17</sup> A.J. Vol.VIII (1851) p.11.



Buckman used coins of the Emperors Trajan and Hadrian as evidence to date the Cirencester pavements, the design of which he compared with those from Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli.<sup>18</sup> The images on coins could also be used to yield information. For instance, Rev. King cited the similarity between a carved pillar found at Lydney Park with the Temple of Minerva on the reverse of a Marcus Aurelius coin, as evidence that the carving was Roman rather than a seventeenth-century copy.<sup>19</sup>

In other instances it was the very 'blandness' of some artefacts that lent itself to any number of interpretations. Roach Smith could enthuse about the significance of a humble pot, "I read upon this relic, whose insignificance had preserved it, a record of its humble history, brief and single, but eloquent from its simplicity and suggestiveness where all else was silence."<sup>20</sup> But its 'suggestiveness' sometimes conveyed more of the observer than of the observed, as was the case with the large iron nails frequently found in Roman graves. These had prompted Mr Wykeham Martin MP to suggest that they had been used for the purposes of crucifixion. "The Roman practice to punish slaves and thieves by crucifixion was sufficiently known."<sup>21</sup> Roach Smith disputed these ideas. He used the reports of other graves where nails had also been discovered in a vertical arrangement around the bodies, to suggest that the most likely explanation was that the wooden coffins had decomposed, leaving only the nails that had held them together. "Modern antiquarians explain these relics in a more simple manner and more in conformity with the spirit of ancient customs."<sup>22</sup> But whereas this might have been the case with Smith and his friends, other antiquarians continued to attribute meanings congruent with their beliefs. One common mistake was to interpret classical objects as evidence of early Christian beliefs and practices. For instance, the well-worn

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<sup>18</sup> Buckman & Newmarch (1850) p.121.

<sup>19</sup> Rev. William Hiley Bathurst "Roman Antiquities at Lydney Park" in Proceedings Society of Antiquaries (1871) Series 2 pp.96-101. King was an expert on coins. Edward Lee consulted him frequently and he wrote the chapter on coins for Isca Silurum, Lee's Caerleon Museum catalogue. Roach Smith thought that Lee had drawn the illustrations for the book about the Lydney Park temple site published in 1879. If he was correct, this is another example of the tightly knit circle in which the antiquarians worked.

<sup>20</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.364

<sup>21</sup> Proceedings Society of Antiquaries Vol. II p.79. The original article was in B.A.A.J. Vol. III (1847) p.47

<sup>22</sup> Roach Smith (1853) p.19

statue of Minerva carved on a rock beside the crossing point of the Dee at Chester, probably owed its survival to the mediaeval belief that it was an image of the Virgin Mary. And Roach Smith complained that classical pagan images on coins and medals continued to be given Christian interpretations, as in the case of a ring carved with the heads of Germanicus and Agrippina that was taken to be the ring given to Mary by Joseph on their betrothal.<sup>23</sup> In all these instances, the interpretation of an ancient object had been influenced by the belief systems of the observer. As a result, the object's supposed meaning often bore little relation to its original purpose.

### Comparisons

A common way of reading more information into isolated objects was to compare them with others of the same type. The journals contain many examples of the way in which the archaeologists sought understanding by comparing objects with others found in different parts of the country. Richard Neville compared the patterns on vases found at Great Chesterford with some found by Mr. Artis.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, detailed comparisons with Italian artefacts were regarded as particularly useful.<sup>25</sup> Some of the archaeologists had travelled to Italy to see these sights for themselves.<sup>26</sup> But for those who had not, there were an increasing number of books that described and illustrated the monuments and artefacts. The best of these was William Gell's Pompeiana, published in 1819, but there were many others.<sup>27</sup> Roman texts and monuments tended to deal with public life such as religious and military ceremonial and therefore, as a great number of the artefacts

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<sup>23</sup> Roach Smith (1857) p.71

<sup>24</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. III (1847) p.212

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the figures on Trajan column were a good source of information on military matters.

<sup>26</sup> The illustrator, Frederick Fairholt kept a journal of his visit to Italy in 1856 (Roach Smith (1861) p.1-64) Edward Lee and Roach Smith both travelled to Italy later in the century. A review of the fourth edition of Murray's Handbook for Southern Italy remarked: "There are few persons of education who are not familiar with these things, and in these days of travel many have examined for themselves the unrivalled collection of antiquities gathered together from the buried town, which has given a wide renown to the Museum of Naples." (Q.R. (1864) p.315)

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Richard Neville used an example from Gell's book to illuminate the use of glass ampulla excavated at Great Chestford. (A.J. Vol. XVII (1860) p.118. Amongst others were Trollope, Illustrations of Roman Art (1854), pamphlets issued by the Society for the diffusion of useful knowledge and more general travel accounts such as Charles Dickens, Pictures from Italy (1845) and Willis' Pencillings by the Way (1st, edn. 1844) John Parker, the publisher and archaeologist, had thousands of photographs taken of ancient sites published 1867-1869.



from Roman Britain were domestic, the findings at Pompeii were particularly helpful and relevant. The Cirencester historian Beecham underlined the importance of the domestic nature of the findings at Pompeii, "Since 1800... the disinterment of the numerous specimens of the domestic economy of the Romans at Pompeii has explained the use of many of their remains, which was before only guessed at."<sup>28</sup> Some of the comparisons were very specific and detailed, such as that made by a reviewer in the Archaeological Journal who compared the carvings on the Colchester vase with the bas-reliefs on the tomb of Scaurus at Pompeii.<sup>29</sup> In the first catalogue of the Cirencester museum, the curator, Professor Church, compared some scratches on a piece of Roman wall plaster with some similar graffiti found in Pompeii and Rome. He declared, "It is very desirable that persons familiar with similar relics in Italy should examine this specimen since its genuineness has been called into question."<sup>30</sup>

Apart from being a particularly rich source of domestic artefacts for comparative purposes, the excavations at Pompeii appear to have had acted as a potent force on the British antiquarians' imaginations and most of the new sites excavated during the 1850s were compared with the city. Octavius Morgan described Caerwent as the 'Monmouthshire Pompeii', and his reports make it quite clear that he was using the Italian site as a guide to what he might expect to find there.<sup>31</sup> Like Morgan, Thomas Wright used the layout of the foundations at Pompeii to inform his excavations at Wroxeter. "It is rather remarkable that the basilica held here exactly the same place in regard to the forum as at Pompeii."<sup>32</sup> A report in the Illustrated London News gives an indication of the excitement and expectations aroused by Wright's excavations. "It is the first time we have had the opportunity of ascertaining the character and condition of a Roman town in Britain and the

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<sup>28</sup> Beecham (1842) p.208.

<sup>29</sup> A.J. Vol. XVIII (1861) p.96.

<sup>30</sup> Church (1867) p.21. (The implication of forgery will be dealt with later in the chapter.)

<sup>31</sup> A.J. Vol. XII (1855) p.79. Morgan described the baths at Caerwent as: "small and as perfect as any I have seen apart from Pompeii." (Morgan (1856) p.18).

<sup>32</sup> Wright (1860) p.69.

discovery has a similar interest for the history of Roman Britain as that of Pompeii had for Italy.”<sup>33</sup>

What these excavations helped to do was to shift the emphasis from the study of the military role played by the Romans in Britain to a consideration of their impact on the domestic life of the country. In such a study, the widespread use of the word ‘Pompeii’ was almost akin to shorthand for a whole complex of associations suggesting wealth and luxury as opposed to military organisation and war. I am not suggesting that this was the conscious intent of the writer, rather that the word was so redolent with images and symbolism that, for certain audiences, further words were unnecessary. As an example, when Wright described some fragments of coloured wall plaster found at Wroxeter he first evoked the image of walls covered with “fine historical subjects as in the walls of Pompeii.” Having created the image, he only then acknowledged that “nothing of this kind has yet been found at Uriconium.”<sup>34</sup> There is a similar juxtaposition in a newspaper report of the Cirencester mosaics, in which the author (probably Buckman) compares them with those at Pompeii and only then adds that, of course “they were made by inferior workmen.”<sup>35</sup> Collingwood Bruce used a comparison between the artefacts found in North Briton and those from the South to draw attention to the very different nature of Roman life in the two areas. “The first thing that strikes one who is chiefly versed in the Roman remains of the North, is the comparative security and luxury of those who were fortunate to live in the South.”<sup>36</sup> He compared the rough stone troughs, millstones and mortars commonly found in the North with the works of art, precious metals and hoards of coins found in the South. The luxurious objects found in villa excavations in the South did much to alter the way in which Roman Britain was imagined. It was no longer seen merely as a remote outpost, but came to be regarded more as a wealthy and important part of the Empire. This change owed a great deal to the study of objects and the way in which they were

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<sup>33</sup> I.L.N. 4<sup>th</sup> September 1859. Although it is possible that this could be an example of Imperial Victorian Britain ‘talking up’ its important past in relation to Imperial Rome, it is also indicative of changing ideas about the nature of Roman Britain.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, (1860) p.49.

<sup>35</sup> W.G.S. 24<sup>th</sup> September 1849

<sup>36</sup> A.J. Vol. XVII (1860) p.343. Bruce was a leading archaeologist on Hadrian’s Wall. His book The Roman Wall was published in 1850.



compared with artefacts from Pompeii, which helped to create the concept of the 'Romano-Britons'.<sup>37</sup>

### Collecting and Museums

The 1853 B.A.A. Journal contains a detailed description of a collection in the Maidstone house of the antiquary Thomas Charles. The house itself was suitably ancient and appears to have been, either intentionally or otherwise, a setting in which the antiquities could be realistically displayed. The description begins at the entrance, "a venerable porch with a massive door, still furnished with its ancient knocker and studded with medieval nails." Among the objects inside, the article mentions, "antique chairs, each of which has a history; large Indian vessels inlaid with silver cases, cases of Australian birds, the staff head of the colours of his regiment, borne by Mr. Charles' brother at the battle of Salamanca, a collection of fossil fish and a diptych that had been found at St Peter's church founded by St Boniface, uncle to the queen of Henry III."<sup>38</sup> It is only after this lengthy description, that the article turns to the Roman antiquities that were displayed in glass cases that ran the length of the room. The detail of the description and the manner in which objects, such as the diptych and the banner, were linked to named individuals recall the methods of Scott or the Musee Cluny in Paris<sup>39</sup>. It was a setting that emphasised age rather than specific periods and thus de-contextualised the individual objects. They no longer represented either their date or function; but had become instead props in an idealised and unspecific past.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bulwer-Lytton's novel The Last Days of Pompeii (1834) contained much detailed information that helped to give a picture of every day life Roman life.

<sup>38</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IX (1853) p.413-4. The visit to the Charles' museum was a part of the B.A.A. annual conference. The anonymous author remarked that the house would have been "a perfect for Mr Page's in Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor." (p.413).

<sup>39</sup> The Musee Cluny had been created in 1843 as a result of the bringing together of the medieval collections of two Frenchmen, Lenoir and Du Sommerard. They were housed in Du Sommerard's medieval house in Paris. See Bann (1984) p.77.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Charles was a doctor. He took part in a number of excavations at Roman sites in Kent. After his death in 1855 he left his house and collection to the town of Maidstone. His friend, the illustrator Charles Pretty became the curator of the museum that also housed the collections of the Kent Archaeological Society founded in 1858. Roach Smith lamented the failure of both men to produce a catalogue. "Every year now weakens the means of identification of many of the most interesting objects, and unfortunately Mr. Charles never even labelled them." (1868) p.313).

These general collections were severely criticised by those who sought to portray archaeology as a science. Predictably, Roach Smith led the criticism. He described the collecting activities of the dilettante gentlemen of the past as, "the odious and still prevailing propensity to appropriate antiquities to gratify the childish feelings of retaining possession of things as merely old."<sup>41</sup> He contrasted this with his own approach to collecting in which the whole tone and character of his future life had been influenced by the sight of Roman remains being destroyed in the city of London. "I became at once a collector; and something more; I studied what I collected."<sup>42</sup> Roach Smith was not alone in his views. In 1851, Lloyd Baker, the chairman of the Cotteswold Natural History Field Club, told his members that 50 years before collectors and museums were laughed at because their museums were too often, "a collection of heterogeneous objects, whose interest lay in their rarity and the only pleasure of the possessor was being able to say that he had got such and such things that others had not."<sup>43</sup> He warned that although collecting was on the increase, "yet it is often to be regretted that the collection is commenced too vaguely, in which case much of the labour is wasted or misdirected."

Some 'collections' hardly merited the title at all. A report in the B.A.A.J. in 1848 described the sorry state of the artefacts salvaged from the Roman centre of Bath. They were owned by the local Philosophical Society, but the author found they were housed in what could only be described as a lumber-room. "A more chaotic scene I never beheld. Heaps of books, manuscripts, bills of parcels, plaster casts, fragments of sculpture, boxes of Samian ware, encaustic tiles, pieces of Roman amphorae and mortaria, were all thrown together... A huge heap of encaustic church tiles lay half smothered in dust, presenting a quiet leaning post for the ponderous cast of a gigantic head and shoulders of a Hercules or Jupiter, who

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<sup>41</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. V p.232. Smith's friend, Charles Warne was even more disparaging. He talked of those who dug in burial mounds for no better reason than the: "indulgence of a craving acquisitiveness, and the adornment of glass cases with ill-understood relics, to be paraded for the empty admiration of those who may descend to flatter the equally vain and ignorant collectors." Cited in Roach Smith (1891) p.178.

<sup>42</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.114.

<sup>43</sup> Proceedings C.N.F.C. Vol. I (London, 1853) p.vii.



seemed to the imagination to recline his head as if dismayed at the surrounding chaos-looking like Caius Marius mourning over the ruins of Carthage.”<sup>44</sup>

The collection in Bath was an extreme example and would have been criticised in any age. But many of the collections do appear to have consisted of a somewhat motley selection of different objects put together without any real purpose other than that they were curious and were offered as gifts. The contents of some of the early museums in the localities I studied do not appear to have differed substantially from the Charles collection in Maidstone.<sup>45</sup> And even quite serious collectors showed decidedly squirrel-like tendencies. In spite of his keen interest in Roman artefacts and the fact that he obviously took his archaeological activities seriously, Wire’s museum in Colchester also contained a mixture of objects more reminiscent of a cabinet of curiosities than a serious collection. Indeed he called it his old curiosity shop.<sup>46</sup> And in 1867, Joseph Mayer’s Egyptian Museum in Liverpool was described as “trembling on the verge of chaos.”<sup>47</sup>

Clearly there was some way to go before antiquarian collections could be regarded as a serious aid to study. There was agreement that collections should enable detailed comparisons and thus allow the development of a system of categorisation, similar to those developed in other sciences such as botany. Indeed, Charles Newton told the Archaeological Institute that, “A museum of antiquities is to the Archaeologist what a botanical garden is to the Botanist. It presents his subject compendiously, synoptically, suggestively, not in the desultory and accidental order in which he would otherwise be brought into contact with its details.”<sup>48</sup> The difficulties arose when they tried to decide how best to go about achieving this aim. There were disagreements about what should be collected, how objects should be described and displayed and even who should own them.

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<sup>44</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IV (1848) p.148-9.

<sup>45</sup> For instance Neville’s museum at Audley Inn and early museums in Colchester and Cirencester.

<sup>46</sup> Wire letter to anon 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1852. (Charles Dickens book of the same name was published in 1840-41)

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Gibson Wright (1988) p.43

<sup>48</sup> A.J. Vol. VIII (1851) p.26. It is worth remembering that many antiquarians were also interested in natural history. For instance Buckman was a professor of botany and Lee was an experienced geologist. Both men were therefore used to working with systems of classification. Newton had spent many years arranging and classifying coins in the British Museum; an activity that also required detailed comparisons.

The first requirement was to be able to correctly attribute artefacts to particular periods, but lack of knowledge frequently made this difficult. The availability of a framework offered by an accepted chronology and the classical texts, meant that issues of attribution were more straight-forward in those collections that were primarily Roman. For instance, as its name suggests, 'The Museum of Roman Antiquities' in Caerleon was set up to house the Roman artefacts from the fortress site. The catalogue, Isca Silurum, confirms that the majority of the contents were both Roman and local. It also illustrates the way in which common assumptions about Roman Britain influenced the way in which the objects were described. The tendency to use the generic label 'Roman' obscured the fact that Britain had been a part of the Empire for four hundred years, with the result that Roman Britain was presented as a static and unchanging society. Another assumption, that Romano-British products were inferior, meant that any well-made artefacts were automatically presumed to be imported. For instance, in the section on Samian Ware, Lee pointed out how abundant such ware was on Roman sites in Britain, but concluded, "There are very sound reasons for believing that the superior kinds of this ware were chiefly imported from Gaul and Germany. But there can be no doubt that an inferior description was manufactured in England."<sup>49</sup> Such assumptions and the resulting museum displays perpetuated the notion that Roman Britain itself was inferior and that the really important developments were those that took place in Rome.<sup>50</sup> But these were matters of interpretation within a known framework. Artefacts from Celtic and Saxon Britain were significantly less well documented and therefore presented greater problems. As John Akerman remarked in An Archaeological Index (1848), "How much such a work has been needed will be seen by reference to many volumes of very imposing size and great pretensions,

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<sup>49</sup> Lee, (1862) p.27. This assumption was still much in evidence in 1872 when Buckman wrote a catalogue for the museum at the Chedworth villa site. "It is highly probable that the more refined articles, such as the better pottery and the glass beads were obtained from the conquerors, much as the wilder aborigines in different parts of the world are at present supplied with such coveted rarities from more civilised traders and settlers. (Buckman (1872) p.30) The labourers on excavation sites shared the assumption as this comment, reported by Richard Neville suggests. "Other relics are of earlier date and better workmanship, and to use an expression of my labourers, everything is 'more regular Roman;' they term it, in consequence, significantly, 'the best' ware." (A.J. Vol.X (1853) p.225)

<sup>50</sup> In 1851, the year the British Room in the British Museum was opened, a guide to the museum's antiquities omits all references to British or Romano-British antiquities "being as yet too insufficiently arranged to admit of classification or description." Vaux (1851) preface. The attitude prevailed into the twentieth century, see Hingley (2000) pp.130-155.



where Celtic, Roman and Anglo Saxon objects are confounded with each other in a manner calculated in every way to embarrass and perplex the archaeological student."<sup>51</sup>

Graves were a particularly important source for artefacts, but the antiquarians experienced difficulty in distinguishing between those created prior to the Roman occupation and those that had been made after their departure. The graves found from the period of Roman occupation itself were easier to identify because of the greater familiarity of the artefacts found in them. A reviewer of Akerman's Pagan Saxondom (1848) highlighted the problem. "It is no easy matter to detail distinguishing characteristics of an Anglo Saxon barrow from one of an earlier date."<sup>52</sup> The attribution of artefacts from such graves was difficult and was made more so where artefacts of different periods were found on the same site. For instance, among the few Celtic objects in the Caerleon museum were some bronze 'celts'.<sup>53</sup> Roach Smith and Wright, had argued that as they were probably of Roman manufacture, they should be classified as Roman or Romano-British. But Lee disagreed, arguing that although they had been discovered on a Roman site, they were manufactured for use by the Celts. "It is almost certain that many celts were made in Roman times, and probably by Roman hands; but as they were not introduced by the conquerors, and as they are chiefly associated with Celtic remains, it seems to me that they cannot well be classed as Roman antiquities."<sup>54</sup> However the artefacts could offer guidance, for instance when Neville discovered two bodies in one grave in Essex. "Here we have one tumulus containing two different modes of internment, which were customary at two different periods, one Roman, the other British."<sup>55</sup> He used the artefacts as a guide to the age of the

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<sup>51</sup> Akerman (1848) preface.

<sup>52</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. XII (1856) p.102. Although anonymous the historian and Anglo Saxon expert, Kemble, probably wrote the review. His article demonstrated the way in which lack of knowledge created confusion. For instance were some metal tips Celtic arrow heads or Saxon spear tips?

<sup>53</sup> This was the contemporary name for a bronze axe head or chisel. These objects had been given this name because earlier antiquaries had supposed them to be the instrument to which the Romans gave the name of Celts. Wright felt that it was: "not good as a technical term, because it is mistaken too generally as implying that things to which it is applied are Celtic, and it would therefore be better to lay it aside." (Wright (1852) p.72).

<sup>54</sup> Lee (1862) p.111. Lee commented that: "it was perfectly natural that the new comers, with their increased facilities for casting metals, would like to carry on a lucrative trade by supplying the natives with them." I wonder how much of the Victorian manufacturer with an eye to trade in the colonies was talking here!

bodies. "With the unburnt skeleton we found flint weapons, acknowledged to be the earliest relics of the earliest inhabitants. Next came burnt bones, iron knife and bronze fibula fragments, Roman and covered in plating. Therefore this would lead us to suppose it belonged to a later period and would tend to confirm the two distinct burials."<sup>56</sup>

The layout of the collections was also open to debate. In the first chapter I described the Danish 'three age' system, according to which objects were divided into three basic types, stone, bronze and iron. It was not a system that was used by the museums I have studied, although its influence can be detected in Neville's analysis of grave artefacts. The failure to use the system was not a result of ignorance since the Danish archaeologist, Worsaae, had visited Britain on several occasions and lectured to the national archaeological bodies; his books had been translated into English; and he maintained a long correspondence with Roach Smith. It is more likely that the system did not appear relevant to collections that were mainly composed of Roman and later artefacts. But it is also possible that the notion of describing the Roman remains as 'Iron Age' presented difficulties to the antiquarians. The idea of the primacy and superiority of classical artefacts and the civilisations that had produced them was still very much a part of the antiquarians' mental map and was an assumption that underpinned much of their work. Their writings are scattered with references to the superiority of the Romans, what they taught their British subjects and what was still to be learnt by emulating Roman methods. Viewed in this way, the Romans were almost a-historical. To see them as a part of an 'Iron Age', in which they were lumped together with others and seen as a phase of material culture, required a leap in conceptual thinking that many of the antiquarians were unwilling to accept.

If there is little evidence to suggest that the Danish system was adopted in the museums I studied, there was no common alternative system in use, either. The original layout of the Caerleon museum is not known, but Edward Lee's catalogue is probably a reasonable guide to the way in which the artefacts were arranged. He chose to divide them into material categories of stone, earthen[ware] (that included

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<sup>55</sup> Neville, *Sepulchra Exposita* (1848) p.28.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. This is a good early example of techniques that would become more common later in the century.



tessellated pavements), vegetable, animal, and metallic. He had a separate catalogue of coins and two further sections, Celtic remains and mediaeval antiquities. He stated that he had based his arrangement on that used by Mr. Wilde in the catalogue of the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy. "This arrangement seems admirably adapted to objects of one period, though not at all proper to be carried out in a general catalogue comprising objects of various ages."<sup>57</sup> As Lee had travelled extensively in Scandinavia, it is more than likely, given his interests that he had visited the museum in Copenhagen. His comments suggest that had his artefacts covered a greater period, he might have used the Danish system.

Roach Smith's catalogue of his Museum of London Antiquities was also largely made up of Roman objects {Plate XIV, p.264}. He stressed that although the collection had been formed out of a series of accidents, rather than as a result of a coherent acquisitions policy, it was not a result of mere fancy or caprice. The objects are divided into even more sections than those in Lee's catalogue, namely: sculptures, bronzes, pottery, red glazed pottery, potters' stamps, glass, tiles, pavements and wall paintings, sandals in leather, utensils and implements, coins and finally Roman and Romano-British artefacts. What is interesting about this arrangement is that it is not based on any apparent system of classification and, in fact, reads more like an inventory. Roach Smith may have been the Roman expert of his day, but the sections on 'Roman' and 'Romano-British' indicate that he also had troubles in attributing objects with any certainty. When he describes an enamelled bronze plate he says the workmanship and ornamentation are comparable to Roman enamels, but the details of the design suggest that it might be sixth century. Or this about a spear head in iron, "I have placed these two spear heads under the head 'Roman', chiefly because the sockets for the stave are perfect, while the early Saxon heads, which, in other respects they resemble, are almost invariably split in the socket."<sup>58</sup>

The only contemporary plan of a museum layout that I have discovered, is John Buckman's rough sketch for the museum in Cirencester.<sup>59</sup> It shows a rectangular

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<sup>57</sup> Lee, (1862) Introduction.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. pp.84 & 83.

<sup>59</sup> In a box labelled 'early museum' in a storeroom in Cirencester Museum.

space with seven cases around the walls in which were displayed: *bone and glass*; pottery; tiles and wall paintings; potters' names and marks; bronzes; iron implements; and vases. Although the range of objects was less extensive, the Cirencester display seems to bear some resemblance to Roach Smith's arrangement of his collection. But what made the Cirencester collection unique was the prominent position given to the tessellated pavements that took up the whole of the floor space in the centre of the building. Indeed, readers of The Illustrated London News could have been excused for thinking that the pavements were the only exhibits on display as nothing else is shown.<sup>60</sup> Buckman described the museum to the Cotteswold Club: "You were struck with [the one thousand exhibits] not from their intrinsic value nor from their beauty of form, but from the many articles they contain of domestic use." <sup>61</sup> However the I.L.N. picture, the space given to the pavements in newspaper reports and Buckman's book, all suggest that the pavements were regarded as the 'stars' of the display.<sup>62</sup> As the frequent comparisons to Pompeii indicate, the effect was to ensure that Romano-British Cirencester was pictured as more 'Roman' than 'British'. It is an example of the way in which the view of the past could be influenced by a museum display emphasising certain objects rather than others.

Ownership was another contentious issue. Collections had traditionally been created by private individuals, either as an eclectic mixture of the strange and exotic, representing very personal facets of the individual collector; or as representative of artefacts of the great classical civilisations. The Charles Museum was an example of the former; the collection of ancient marbles and specimens of ancient art owned by John Disney was an example of the latter. Disney donated his collection to Cambridge University in 1850, the same year that he endowed the chair of classical archaeology, first held by John Marsden. A catalogue to Disney's collection was published in 1846-8 and was reviewed in the Archaeological Journal. The review praised Disney's actions in sharing knowledge of his treasures with the public, but drew attention to the number of artefacts that were not so

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<sup>60</sup> I.L.N. 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1856.

<sup>61</sup> Proceedings C.N.F.C. Vol. II Report of meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1857

<sup>62</sup> Both the Cirencester Library Committee and the Chester Archaeological Society saw the creation of a museum as a way of attracting visitors to their town.



available “Few persons are aware of the vast aggregate amount of the private collections in this country.”<sup>63</sup>

To the activists in the emerging science of archaeology, the Charles and Disney collections offended in several respects. What the new science required was orderly, systematic collections of all the artefacts from a particular period, not just those judged to be representative of ‘great art’ or a reflection of personal caprice. Once formed, it was essential that the collections should be in the public domain, either physically in a museum, or alternatively in a well-researched catalogue. Most private collections did not meet these criteria. For example, the Bathurst Museum in Cirencester was open to the public. But when Professor Church wrote the first catalogue in 1867 he described the arrangement as ‘unsatisfactory’ and the absence of a catalogue, “had been felt as a drawback to the value and usefulness of the collection.”<sup>64</sup> At the Institute’s Annual meeting in 1855, the President listed a number of private collections open to students of antiquity and, by implication, that offered some of the best material for study. They belonged to William Rolfe,<sup>65</sup> Thomas Bateman,<sup>66</sup> Richard Neville, Lord Londesborough,<sup>67</sup> Joseph Mayer and the ‘late Mr. Charles at Maidstone’.<sup>68</sup> It is instructive to look at what was actually

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<sup>63</sup> *A.J.* Vol. VI (1849) p.83. It would appear that the situation was still much the same later in the century. An 1883 review of Professor Michaelis’ *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* reported that: “The student naturally wants to know the whereabouts of all the remains of ancient art and as these are spread about the country in various private collections, he was left pretty much without a guide.” *The Antiquary* Vol. VIII (1883) p.27

<sup>64</sup> Church (1867) preface. It is interesting to wonder what Buckman thought of these comments. They could account for the somewhat sour tone of his comments in the catalogue he wrote for the Chedworth Roman villa site in 1872.

<sup>65</sup> William Rolfe (1779-1859) was a farmer, town councillor and antiquarian from Sandwich in Kent. He did some excavating in Roman Richborough, but his collection consisted mainly of Anglo Saxon and medieval remains. Most of his collection was bought in 1857 by Joseph Mayer, with Roach Smith and Joseph Clarke acting as intermediaries.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Bateman (1821-1861) was a non conformist from a wealthy family in Derbyshire. He was primarily involved with the excavation of barrows and was nicknamed the ‘Barrow Knight’ by a fellow antiquarian Stephen Isaacson. He was very interested in ethnology and the new ‘science’ of phrenology. His son sold large parts of his collection, but some artefacts and his papers were bought by Sheffield Museum in 1893 for £1,600.

<sup>67</sup> Lord Albert Conynham was the first President of the B.A.A. He was an enthusiastic excavator of Anglo Saxon barrows assisted by Akerman. After inheriting a fortune in 1849 he bought a country estate, including its museum of antiquities. He had the contents drawn by Fairholt and described by Wright in a private publication, *Miscellanea Graphica*.

<sup>68</sup> See above. These were by no means the only good local collections. Others that the President might have mentioned were John Clayton’s Museum of Roman Antiquities at Chesters and the Duke of Northumberland’s collection of British antiquities that he had offered to the British Museum if they would create a British Room.

offered in these collections. None of them was open to the general public. A prospective visitor would have to know both of their existence and the nature of their contents, and they would also have to have an introduction to their owner. One of the advantages of membership of an archaeological association was that it did open the door to these private collections. But to those who were outside this exclusive circle, the collections remained essentially unknown and unavailable. Joseph Mayer's Egyptian collection was catalogued when his museum opened in 1852, but all the objects added subsequently, including Rolfe's, remained uncatalogued, except for a very crude system of acquisition numbers.<sup>69</sup> I have found no reference to a catalogue for Neville's collection, only a somewhat pious hope in the Archaeological Journal. "It were much to be desired that this spirited antiquary should be disposed to produce a description or catalogue of the Audley End Museum, the creation of his zeal and intelligence in the cause of national archaeology."<sup>70</sup> In view of his active role in archaeological matters this is rather surprising and it is possible that he felt his numerous, illustrated articles in the journal should suffice. In fact out of those museums cited by the Institute, only Bateman's was properly catalogued.<sup>71</sup>

Apart from detailed knowledge, the great advantage offered by a catalogue was that it ensured that, at least on paper, the information contained in a collection would remain intact. For the greatest drawback of private collections was that the future was never assured and they were frequently broken up and dispersed when the owner died, as the antiquarian Vere Irving pointed out in 1859. "It often seems impossible to account for the way in which articles in private collections, the existence of which was at one time well known among antiquaries, disappear without leaving a trace behind."<sup>72</sup> Once dispersed, objects could no longer be linked to a particular site and to other objects, with a consequent loss of

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<sup>69</sup> See Gibson & Wright (1988) p.43 and note 52 in the social context chapter.

<sup>70</sup> A.J. Vol.XI (1854) p.399.

<sup>71</sup> A Descriptive Catalogue of the Antiquities and Miscellaneous Objects preserved in the Museum of Thomas Bateman at Lomberdale House, Derbyshire (Bakewell, 1855) The contents were divided into five sections; Britannic, Ethnological, Relics, Arms and armour and Collections illustrative of arts and manufacture. The Britannic section was sub-divided into Celtic, Roman and Romano-British.

<sup>72</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.XV, p.93.



information.”<sup>73</sup> Roach Smith used a Mr. Purnell as an example of what often happened. Purnell had a large collection of Roman artefacts from the Cirencester area. “Now it had passed through the hands of the London auctioneer and is lost to science. I, in vain, urged him to print an illustrated catalogue. He was a man of affluence and could well have afforded the cost and the collection was worthy of permanent record.”<sup>74</sup> William Wire only produced a catalogue of the objects in his collection in order to inform potential purchasers and facilitate their sale.<sup>75</sup>

Most serious collectors did try to ensure that their collections were not dispersed. A review of Bateman’s catalogue stated, “Fully alive to the uncertainty attending the preservation and transmission of all private collections, Mr. Bateman has wisely determined to leave a record of that which he has brought together.”<sup>76</sup> When financial pressures meant that collections had to be sold, the owners searched for individuals willing to buy the whole collection, rather than single objects. Mayer was probably projecting his own feelings as a collector when he wrote to Rolfe, “I cannot bear the idea of breaking up and scattering a collection that must have been a source of pleasure to you to collect.”<sup>77</sup> But the ultimate example of a collector striving to protect his collection must be Roach Smith. When financial difficulties and ill health forced him to consider the sale of his collection he produced a catalogue “to ensure its integrity and to serve for reference and authentication.”<sup>78</sup> He refused Lord Londesborough’s offer of £3,000 in favour of the British Museum’s offer of £2,000 because he believed the museum would keep it intact.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The great importance attached to the Faussett collection was the fact that he had kept a careful record of his excavations, recording sites and which objects had been found together. This was almost unique then (mid eighteenth-century) and still often neglected in the 1850’s.

<sup>74</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.39. In the preface to Remains of Roman Art, Buckman thanks Purnell along with Rev. Powell, T.C. Brown and Mrs Mullings for lending their ‘valuable relics’ to be drawn for the illustrations.

<sup>75</sup> Wire mentioned the catalogue in a letter to the engraver Charles Clarke. (letter 30<sup>th</sup> January 1852)

<sup>76</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol.XII (1856) p.201

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Mayer to Rolfe 8<sup>th</sup> September 1857. Quoted in Gibson & Wright (1988) p.12.

<sup>78</sup> Roach Smith (1886) p.224.

<sup>79</sup> Roach Smith’s collection came on the market only one year after the British Museum’s failure to buy the Faussett collection had provoked such fury. See chapter 2 and Roach Smith (1886) pp.224-236. The latter includes the petition to Parliament supporting the sale to the national collection. It is signed by all the ‘great and the good’ in the contemporary archaeological world. Smith’s collection formed the nucleus of the Museum’s Romano-British collection.

Another way of avoiding dispersal of private collections was by the formation of locally-based public museums that could act as a collection centre for a whole area. The four areas I studied demonstrate the various ways in which such museums came to be founded, with the differing approaches reflecting the different social structures. The significance of the semantic change from 'collections' to 'museums' represents this moving locus of control from private individual to community. In Chester, although there were some rather half-hearted attempts on the part of the archaeological society to create a museum, there was no real movement away from a proliferation of small privately-owned collections until the 1880s. In Cirencester, the museum was concentrated in one set of private hands, although, by offering a place to objects owned by other people, it did make some gestures towards being representative of the town as a whole. In Caerleon, the museum was created by a local archaeological society with no assistance from the local authority. In Colchester, although the town council initially tried to form a collection, the local archaeological society came to play an increasingly dominant role and the museum was eventually financed and administered by the two bodies acting in tandem. In their very different ways the museums in Caerleon, Cirencester and Colchester could all be recognised as suitable repositories for local artefacts. As Augustus Franks pointed out in 1852, "Local museums are institutions of great value, as they rescue from destruction many relics which would otherwise be lost, and they encourage a local feeling of reverence for the memorials of the past." But there was a sting in the tail. "Objects of great importance to the archaeologist often lie buried in these far distant receptacles, affording him facts of the highest value as links in a great chain, but in their isolation perfectly useless."<sup>80</sup>

Artefacts from the past had become highly prized for a number of reasons. Ideally, they were able to tell the story of the past in their area.<sup>81</sup> They might also contribute to knowledge of the national past. They were certainly expected to

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<sup>80</sup> A.J. Vol. IX (1852) p.14. Franks was the first curator of the British Room in the British Museum and gave an annual report on new acquisitions to the Archaeological Institute.

<sup>81</sup> A disadvantage of several private collectors in one area was that no one collection contained all the available information. For instance, Roach Smith observed that a collection of Roman artefacts belonging to Mr. Taylor at Great Chesterford should have been united to that of Neville at Audley End. Instead it had disappeared. (Roach Smith (1886) p.41).



enhance the prestige of their owners, be they individuals or a corporate body.<sup>82</sup> Inevitably this led to a market in which the value of antiquities was greatly enhanced.

### The Market

The demand for classical antiquities had been a feature of the Grand Tour in Italy, and had fostered a lively market which dealers had been only too willing to supply.<sup>83</sup> The interest in British archaeology during the nineteenth century meant that the market was extended to include British antiquities, with the result that a collection of artefacts was within the means of individuals who could not afford to go on the Grand Tour. Activities that had previously been regarded as the province of the rich and titled became available to a wider group, not necessarily all archaeologists.

The historian John Kemble believed that, “we are collectors even as our predecessors were; but we are collectors with a definite purpose and in a definite method.”<sup>84</sup> But there were many other collectors whose interest was anything but archaeological, as Roach Smith commented in 1857. “This taste for collecting has been fostered by the increased attention paid to archaeology. But it has not only grown with the science, it has far outstripped its audience... The possibility of applying antiquities to historical, artistic or any useful purpose is too often lost sight of in the eagerness of competition and in the race for obtaining possession.”<sup>85</sup> To emphasis his point, Smith cited the tourists who visited the Roman pharos (lighthouse) at Dover merely because it was old, or worse still those who “chip off pieces of ancient walls and pick out tesserae from pavements to carry away as

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<sup>82</sup> Even when private collections were amalgamated with others, they were frequently kept as separate entities within the collection. For instance the Colchester Museum catalogue compiled in 1870 listed the Vint and Acton collections separately. The same applied to the collections acquired by Joseph Mayer.

<sup>83</sup> Henry Tresham drew ‘Grand Tourists purchasing antiquities’ (1790). His picture shows tourists examining artefacts in the middle of an excavation site. The sculptor Joseph Nollekens described the way in which the dealer Jenkins met the demand for antique gems in Rome in the 1760’s. “He followed the trade of supplying the foreign visitors with intaglios and cameos made by his own people, that he kept in the ruins of the Coliseum (sic), fitted up for them to work in slyly by themselves.” (Cited in Jones (1990) p.147).

<sup>84</sup> A.J. Vol. VI (1849) p.2.

<sup>85</sup> Roach Smith (1857) p.197.

trophies.”<sup>86</sup> The York antiquarian Charles Wellbeloved also commented on the high prices paid for “the most worthless articles from persons not able to appreciate the value of what they were eager to possess.”<sup>87</sup> Nor was the race for possession confined to the ignorant, it was also found among dealers and more knowledgeable collectors. In a letter to William Wire, Roach Smith told him that one coin displayed at a meeting of the Numismatic Society had disappeared. “In my opinion it was purloined by someone (God knows who). Mr. Pindall at Sotheby’s the auctioneer, states that the thefts that are perpetuated in his rooms by coin collectors are most scandalous. He has detected two persons, rich collectors in the actual fact.”<sup>88</sup> There was often fierce competition between potential owners, as happened in the case of the ninth century Aethelswith ring. The ring had been dug up by an agricultural worker and hung on his dog’s collar. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society had wanted to buy it, but were beaten at the sale by Canon Greenwell, who promised to leave it to the Society in his will, but instead sold it to Augustus Franks.<sup>89</sup> And there was the obsessive book collector, Thomas Phillips, whose zeal to buy was reputed to have inflated prices at auctions and caused many books of national importance to be lost to public bodies who could not match his bids.<sup>90</sup>

Several individuals were both collectors and dealers. William Wire is one example and another is the dealer and archaeologist, William Chaffer, whose various activities illustrate the many different and overlapping ways in which one individual could be involved with antiquities. Like his friend Roach Smith, Chaffer took diligent notice of the Roman artefacts unearthed on London building sites. He made drawings and presented papers on his observations to the Society of Antiquaries and the B.A.A.<sup>91</sup> He became a dealer, supplying, among others, Joseph Mayer in Liverpool. He valued the Faussett Collection and acted as an

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.214.

<sup>87</sup> Wellbeloved (1842) p.144.

<sup>88</sup> Roach Smith to Wire, 26<sup>th</sup>, January 1844 (letter in the Essex Museum Service).

<sup>89</sup> Franks gave the ring to the British Museum. See Wilson (1984) p.30.

<sup>90</sup> Munby (1951) Vol. IV pp.35 & 169. Phillips was continually in debt as a result of his expenditure on his collection.

<sup>91</sup> For instance; “Bronze figure of an archer” in *Archaeologia* Vol. XXX p.543-544 and “On a Roman building discovered in Lower Thames Street” in *B.A.A.J.* Vol. IV p.45-49



intermediary between Mayer and the Faussett family when Mayer bought the collection in 1855. The Essex Society used him to value Acton's collection in 1861 and to produce a catalogue for the museum and arrange cases for the display in 1862.<sup>92</sup> In addition, Chaffer also superintended and compiled the catalogues for several exhibitions, including the Exhibition of Works of Art at South Kensington in 1862.<sup>93</sup> Another example of an individual with a series of over-lapping relationships with objects was Augustus Franks. Apart from his museum duties, he played an active part in the Archaeological Institute and the Society of Antiquaries and was a respected collector in his own right.<sup>94</sup> All these individuals were involved with the artefacts in a much more complex way than would be suggested by the word 'dealer'.

Another indication of the demand for antiquities is to be found in the various accounts of the way in which prices were inflated. For example, Chaffers acquired a bronze statue of a Roman archer from a London building site and sold it for £100 to Lord Londesborough. After his death the bronze was sold to the British Museum for £300 and the Louvre offered £400 after seeing a cast of it sent to them by Chaffers.<sup>95</sup> Coins were particularly popular as collectable items and several books with price guides were published, including Akerman's Ancient and Modern Coins (1848). But prices could be difficult to predict, as Roach Smith warned Wire. "As for naming a precise sum, you must know enough of the whims of collectors to be sure that any collectable coin, when one bids against another, the price may be advanced."<sup>96</sup> High expectations often meant that the sale of coins proved disappointing. A Mr. Dunn found a cache of William I coins that because of their rarity "had born a value pretty nearly equivalent to its weight in diamond-carats."<sup>97</sup> But when he sold them to the British Museum he received a mere £300. In Roach

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<sup>92</sup> E.A.S. Minutes, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1861 and 13<sup>th</sup> February 1862.

<sup>93</sup> Roach Smith (1886) p.103-104.

<sup>94</sup> See Wilson (1984) and Caygill & Cherry (1997).

<sup>95</sup> Roach Smith (1886) p.103. Smith also quotes a letter from Francis Hobler in which he says that he sold his collection of coins for £1, 759 and probably would have got more had he been able to wait for another year. (Ibid. p.193).

<sup>96</sup> Roach Smith to Wire, 20<sup>th</sup>, October 1852. (E.M.S.).

<sup>97</sup> Q.R. Vol. CXLIV, September 1843 p.376.

Smith's opinion this was, "by no means an illiberal sum, for although there were rare types, they were generally common and the large number made them more so."<sup>98</sup> Similar, unrealistic expectations led to Chaffers being sued by the executors of a will, as he had failed to achieve the amount they had hoped to receive for a collection of Roman coins.<sup>99</sup>

It is difficult to understand how articles were valued. A speaker to the 1859 B.A.A. conference deplored the way in which middle-men raised prices and created, "a great risk of confusion and error in the information as to the locality and circumstances of the original discovery."<sup>100</sup> But his point merely serves to emphasise the different perspectives of the archaeologist and the dealer, to whom such information was of no moment. It was perhaps to avoid such uncertainties that Wire decided to sell his collection privately and, to this end, sent out a number of letters in which he listed the items for sale and their price. A Roman roof tile was marked 2s (shillings), an embossed Samian ware bowl was 7s 6d and a specimen of tessellated pavement on an original foundation 12s.<sup>101</sup>

The booming market ensured that the workmen, who were usually the first to unearth artefacts, tried to profit by their discovery. This presented a dilemma to the archaeologists who, on the one hand, wanted to alert the men to look out for artefacts because of their archaeological value, but in so doing they also raised awareness of their potential monetary value. As I pointed out in the Colchester chapter, these differences led to frequent disagreements between the men, the archaeologists and the owner of the site. In London, Roach Smith encouraged the workmen "by the most persuasive of all arguments, to preserve, and also to understand what to preserve."<sup>102</sup> He adds, "For this I was summoned before the Lord Mayor as a receiver of stolen property!"<sup>103</sup> Rev. Massie, in Chester, seems to

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<sup>98</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.31.

<sup>99</sup> Roach Smith (1886) p.104.

<sup>100</sup> Vere Irving B.A.A.J. Vol. XV (1859) p.93.

<sup>101</sup> Letters sent out to several people in January 1852. He says he was getting rid of the collection because of the demands of his growing family: "none of whom show any interest and the money would be useful." Wire letters book. (Essex R.O.) He sold his collection of manuscripts, books of scraps, cuttings, scarce tracts, to Mr. Acton for £30. "I am sorry to part with them." (Wire Journal, 3<sup>rd</sup>, May 1855.)

<sup>102</sup> Roach Smith (1854) p.v.

<sup>103</sup> Roach Smith (1886) p.207.



have been more successful in persuading the workmen to bring him the artefacts they found.<sup>104</sup>

More usually the workmen attempted to sell their discoveries, often destroying the artefacts in the process. One example of this was a vase filled with coins that had adhered together in a large mass. The case was broken open and the coins broken apart with spades. "In this way several hundreds had disappeared before the fact of the treasure trove was known."<sup>105</sup>

Another man finding three vases full of coins, sold them and used the proceeds to set up in business. When he died he left £1,500.<sup>106</sup> A misunderstanding between a finder and a local antiquary helps to illustrate the difficulties experienced by the antiquarians in their dealings with the workmen. Vases had been discovered near to the site of a tessellated pavement and the antiquary asked to see some coins in the hope that they would assist him in dating it. But the workman assumed that this would lead to the his prosecution for selling them, so he refused. And the exact spot where Roman and Celtic skulls had been discovered on the banks of the Thames "has been most jealously concealed by both workmen and curiosity dealers."<sup>107</sup>

Given high demand and rising prices, it was probably inevitable that some individuals would turn to forgery as a way of exploiting the market. Letters and journal articles indicate that the antiquarians were aware of the danger. Richard Neville told the Institute in 1857, "I am afraid that so long as the present keen research after antiquities continues and so many collectors are in the field, so long will such a state of things [as forgery] exist. This keenness of research is of course a necessary consequence of the spread of archaeological knowledge... It is the great eagerness shown by collectors which has led to the results we now experience."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See Chester Chapter.

<sup>105</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. XII (1856) p.236. The report went on that many coins had been bartered for beer.

<sup>106</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.32.

<sup>107</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. XIII (1857) p.237.

<sup>108</sup> A.J. Vol. XIV (1857) p.172.

But the definition of forgery was often unclear. It had been accepted practice in the eighteenth century for broken fragments of antique statues and ornaments to be restored and for unrelated pieces to be moulded together to 'create' a new whole object.<sup>109</sup> As late as the 1840s, Roach Smith found it acceptable to add a nose to 'a very fine antique bust of Marcus Aurelius before presenting it to Lord Londesborough for display in his sculpture gallery.'<sup>110</sup> Another complicating factor was the way in which contemporary manufacturers copied some of the processes of the ancient world. A good example of this was the jewellery produced by the Italian firm, Castellani. Father and sons Castellani were involved in excavations of the Etruscan sites and used the excavated jewellery as models for modern versions that were very successful commercially. But the difference between original and copy was often intentionally 'vague'.<sup>111</sup>

Sometimes workmen attempted to sell miscellaneous collections of objects as Roman antiquities from a specific site. When Thomas Gutson visited a newly-revealed stretch of Roman wall in London, he asked whether any pottery had been discovered. He was immediately presented with an earthen lamp, a bronze fibula, two brass coins of Nero and Hadrian, several necks of amphorae, portions of Samian ware, a beautiful Etruscan head of Vesta, a fragment of a Venus and three others in terracotta, besides two small bronze Egyptian figures of Osiris. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Gutson smelled a rat. "Knowing it to be utterly impossible for such a collection to be discovered in the heart of the city, I watched the excavations but I have only been able to trace two men engaged in this system of

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<sup>109</sup> For instance the Piranese vase in the British Museum was a reconstruction by the antiquarian G.B. Piranesi. Modern scholars believe that only about thirty per cent of the vase is original. Piranesi illustrated this vase in volume II of his *vasi* (1778) A nineteenth century example was the imported Greek vase displayed to the B.A.A. in 1855. A penknife scratch revealed that: "the ancient Greek cup is mounted upon the foot of a Venetian goblet and the rich handles were manufactured at Murano in the seventeenth century." *B.A.A.J.* Vol. XI (1855) p.69. The speaker pointed out that: "Italy had ever been the hotbed of forgery." This view was confirmed in a letter Fairholt wrote from Rome in 1857. "Rome is not the place to get antiquities, if they are genuine they are absurdly dear and forgeries of all kinds abound. In fact the making of antiquities is a regular trade in Italy, conducted with much ingenuity and talent by really clever people who carefully study genuine antiques and imitate their peculiarities...Travellers will eagerly buy there what they would not care to purchase from honest traders at home." (Cited in Roach Smith (1861) p.82)

<sup>110</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.114. The middle years of nineteenth century was also the high point of the Victorian passion for restoring Gothic churches, another indication that the 'old' was not always what it appeared to be!

<sup>111</sup> The family promoted a successful Etruscan exhibition in London in 1837 that was instrumental in interesting British scholars, such as Hamilton Grey and Dennis, in Etruria. Starting in the 1850's the firm made 'archaeological style' jewellery. Alessandro Castellani sold a large collection of ancient jewellery to the British Museum in 1872, now considered to be of nineteenth-century origin. See Jones (1990) p.167.



deceit.”<sup>112</sup> More typical were the activities of dealers who travelled around the country selling wares to unsuspecting antiquarians. The archaeological journals are full of general warnings and, where possible, the specific details of the individuals concerned. The antiquarians also attempted to track the dealers activities for themselves, as a series of letters between Roach Smith in London and Wire in Colchester reveal.<sup>113</sup> The most notorious case of forgery involved two workmen in London, who manufactured ‘medieval’ objects and sold them to a dealer, George Eastwood. In a lecture to the B.A.A. in 1858, the archaeologist Syer Cuming<sup>114</sup> denounced them as fakes. His lecture was reported in the Athenaeum and as a result Eastwood sued the magazine for libel. The trial, in which Roach Smith was called as a witness and declared the objects genuine, was widely reported and the objects became known as ‘Billy and Charley’s’ after the names of the two workmen concerned.<sup>115</sup> Among those taken in was Joseph Mayer, although by 1863 he was exhibiting them as forgeries to the Lancashire Historic Society.<sup>116</sup>

The importance of these forgeries to the antiquarians was not so much the monetary fraud so much as the question it cast over the validity of the objects themselves, and therefore on their value as evidence. As this chapter has tried to demonstrate, material objects were highly valued because they were seen as a

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<sup>112</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. IX (1853) p.85. Wire reported a similar disparate collection that was supposed to have been unearthed in Colchester. He concluded: “It is said by some antiquarians that the whole of the above, excepting the urn, were of modern fabrication.” (Wire Journal 19<sup>th</sup>, March 1844).

<sup>113</sup> In 1842 Roach Smith warned Wire that Singleton, a dealer in forged coins had sold spurious coins in Colchester. Wire wrote in his journal that he had not brought any coins from: “the fellow who called himself Mr. Hunt Temple of London.” Wire then wrote a letter to Temple, who returned it, as it was not intended for him. “Thereby proving that the fellow entered a false name in my address book.” In 1843 Roach Smith told Wire he thought the forger of ancient coins was called Rousseau of Rue Pont de Lodi in Paris. In 1847 Wire refused to buy coins from a man called Jacob because he believed they were forged and that: “Jacob was in close contact with a gang of forgers.” They were still concerned in 1851 as Wire wrote that he had seen them over several years and he thought the forger was: “acquainted with several clever persons and one in particular is a good engraver.” Roach Smith must have sent him a picture of the forger Singleton, but Wire replied that it was not the same man who had called on him. (Wire Journal 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup>, December 1842, 15<sup>th</sup>, October 1843 and 15<sup>th</sup>, July 1847. Wire letter book 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, June 1851).

<sup>114</sup> Syer Cuming was particularly concerned with forgery and wrote a series of articles on the subject for the J.B.A.A. He and his father created a museum that included a section on forgeries. The collection was given to the London borough of Southwark in 1906 and is still in existence.

<sup>115</sup> Syer Cuming’s original article is in B.A.A.J. Vol. XIV (1857) p.348. Roach Smith’s description of the objects and the trial is in Smith (1861) p.252. The huge number of objects, said at the trial to be over two thousand, led to continued speculation about their provenance. In 1864 the antiquarian Charles Reed found evidence that the objects were indeed forged. His report concluded: “That illiterate ‘mud rakers’ should have acquired such power of design and manipulation as these productions evince may lead us to wish that such talent had found a worthier sphere for its development.” A.J. Vol.XXI (1864) pp.167-8

<sup>116</sup> Trans. Historic Society of Lacashire & Chesire Vol. XV (1863) p.248.

direct link with the past and conveyed knowledge of that past that was not available through any other source. As Roach Smith remarked on the inscriptions found on the Roman Wall, "They are historical records of unquestionable authority, free from interpretation or fraud of any kind."<sup>117</sup> More than that, they were the source of evidence of the past that was unique to the antiquarians and gave them a claim to be taken seriously as students of the past, alongside the historians and their texts.

### *Objects as Symbols*

The previous section examined the ways in which objects were used to study the Romans and Roman Britain. However tenuous or fanciful, the focus of study was always on the past. In this section I will be examining the ways in which objects were used in the present, in which they were owned by somebody and could be displayed and arranged in a number of different ways, or could be props in the creation of an historical narrative. In other words, rather than describing the Roman past, such objects were descriptive of their owners and contemporary beliefs.

Susan Pearce has described the way in which the symbolic qualities of objects are used to "create an idea of our essential selves in the past, present and future."<sup>118</sup> The objects with which one surrounds oneself in everyday life help to create the impression one presents to the world. They are an act of self-definition, an autobiography even, through which one can proclaim a sense of 'self'. To some extent this applies to all the objects in one's surroundings, but it is particularly applicable to those objects that are chosen in a self-conscious manner for a collection or display. Seen in this light, historical objects are divorced from the past and instead represent personal attributes of their owner in the present. The cultural historian, Walter Benjamin, described ownership as, "the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him, it is he who lives in them."<sup>119</sup> Probably because of the passionate interest shown by

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<sup>117</sup> Roach Smith (1883) p.170.

<sup>118</sup> Pearce Symbols of Ourselves: Objects of Possession, Paper given at a conference on Material Memories at the Victoria and Albert Museum in April 1998.

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin (1970).



collectors, the act of collecting has attracted a great deal of psychoanalytic attention. Susan Pearce used Joseph Mayer as an example of an individual whose collection appeared to “have grown up around him as an extension of his person.”<sup>120</sup> And there are many other collectors who would seem to fit her description. Augustus Franks, who in addition to his work in the British Museum was also a great collector, wrote, “Collecting is an hereditary disease, and I fear incurable.”<sup>121</sup> Another inveterate collector was Lady Charlotte Schreiber, who was reported as touring the pawnbrokers of Liverpool in her quest for acquisitions to add to her collection of ceramics.<sup>122</sup>

In nineteenth century Britain (as now to some extent) a collection had value as a symbol of its owner’s prestige and standing in his community. This was as true of small collectors in the provinces, such as Mr Charles in Maidstone, as it was of major collectors such as Townley in London. As though to emphasise the identification between owner and collection, several of the larger collectors had their portraits painted surrounded by their artefacts, a process which created the impression that the owners were ‘a part of’, rather than merely the ‘owners of’ their collections. Mayer chose to have his portrait painted with his collection twice. The two pictures provide interesting visual proof of changing trends in the fashion for antiquities. In 1840, William Daniels portrayed him sitting in a ‘Gothic’ chair, surrounded by an eclectic collection, including both Roman and mediaeval artefacts. By 1856, John Harrison pictures him against a background entirely composed of Egyptian artefacts, a sign of his increasingly specialised interests. The fact that Roach Smith did not choose to be portrayed in such a manner is probably an indication of his more objective interest in the artefacts, although it could also be due to his limited finances.

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<sup>120</sup> Pearce (1990) p.21. See Gibson and Wright (1988) For collectors Elsner & Cardinal (1994.) They describe the most obsessive collectors as ‘teetering between mastery and madness’ (p.6). This description would certainly seem to apply to Sir Thomas Phillips, whose collection included 60,000 manuscripts and 50,000 printed books and pamphlets. Phillips was a member of various antiquarian bodies, but quarrelled with them all. (Levine (1986) p.21).

<sup>121</sup> Franks, “The Apology of my life “ Appendix I in Caygill & Cherry (1997) p.318.

<sup>122</sup> Guest (1911) p.59.

## The Personalised Object

One of the most intriguing aspects of the object in historical research is that it is both a material reality in the present and, at the same time, represents an aspect of the past. As the antiquarian, Thomas Bateman, wrote, "The emotional character so obvious in nearly every relic that has come down to us, addresses us almost with the distinctness of vocal sounds."<sup>123</sup> But the problem for the antiquarians was to understand what it was that the antiquities were 'saying', for one effect of their dual nature is to blur the element of time, so that an ancient object can appear to make the past seem either too distant or almost contemporary.<sup>124</sup>

A sense of greater distance was brought about by historical methods that highlighted the differences between past and present, between then and now. Previously historical analysis had tended to concentrate on the philosophical and political ideas upon which public life and government should be based. Roman beliefs and policy had been seen as relevant to contemporary concerns and therefore appropriate models for contemporary behaviour. It was an approach that presumed close parallels between the Romans and the present. However in the early years of the nineteenth century a greater emphasis began to be put on historical accuracy. It was seen as important that the details of objects, such as furniture, clothing and domestic utensils, should be correct for the period and in so doing emphasised the differences between contemporary society and people in the past.

A major factor in the trend towards greater accuracy was the influence of the enormously popular historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. He created vivid images of the past by assembling a mass of small and accurate details, in much the same way that antiquarians concerned themselves with the minutiae of archaeological and historical detail. The resemblance was acknowledged by a speaker to the Archaeological Institute in 1856. "The impulse to which we may trace the growing taste for archaeological investigation is to be sought in the wizard's spell which

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<sup>123</sup> A.J. Vol. XIII (1856) p.420.

<sup>124</sup> This 'dual nature' was also apparent in the ruins of Rome. "The sight of Rome, while it brings us near, as nothing else can bring us in the same degree, to the men and the actions of the city's ancient days, makes us at the same time, realise in a manner altogether peculiar the vastness of the interval which separates us from them." (Q.R. (1864) p.200).



emanated from Abbotsford.”<sup>125</sup> Scott himself had been an antiquary and had recreated his lost ancestral home by appropriating a range of fragments and objects with which he created the impression of genuine age.<sup>126</sup> It was a method he followed with equal flair in his novels. According to an article in the Edinburgh Review, “Scott’s pre-eminent success had changed the whole tone and character of historical literature. He has substituted the picturesque for the philosophical style.”<sup>127</sup> Scott had gathered together a large collection of artefacts to assist him in creating an accurate picture of the past. When his publishers decided to re-issue the Waverley Novels in 1842, they used the objects from Scott’s collection as models for the illustrations. The preface declared, “This is the age of graphically illustrated books and it remained to affix to these works, so interwoven everywhere with details of historical and antiquarian interest, such engraved embellishments as... [the author’s] ...personal tastes and resources would most probably induced him to place before students of antiquity.”<sup>128</sup>

The search for greater historical accuracy was part of the motivation for books that were based upon original research in medieval documents.<sup>129</sup> In 1840, George Craik and Charles Macfarlane published The Pictorial History of England that featured accurately-drawn illustrations of clothes, furniture and other objects. According to the Edinburgh Review, “We can no longer tolerate Plantagenet princes and princesses in the garb and character of modern courts.”<sup>130</sup> Another manifestation of the increased interest in historical accuracy is to be seen in a number of organised events that reconstructed a medieval scenario. For example, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert appeared as Edward III and Queen Philippa at a ball in 1842, and wealthy men recreated a medieval joust at the Eglinton

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<sup>125</sup> A.J. Vol. XIII (1856) p.199.

<sup>126</sup> See Bann (1984) Chapter 5.

<sup>127</sup> E.R. January 1842 p.434.

<sup>128</sup> Sir Walter Scott, Waverley Novels Vol.I (Cadell, Edinburgh, 1842-6) preface.

<sup>129</sup> The first and most influential of these were by Joseph Strutt, for instance A Complete view of the dress and habits of the people of England (1796-99) This included a plate, ‘Dresses of the Anglo Saxon women of the eighth century’ that was based on a Saxon book of Genesis in the British Museum.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p.430.

Tournament in 1839.<sup>131</sup> The emphasis on accurate detail increased the ‘felt distance’ from various periods in the past. As the Edinburgh Review remarked, “We acquire a habit of contemplating our ancestors, certainly not as ignorant barbarians; but as quaint respectable oddities, very much to be admired and studied, but altogether incommensurable with ourselves.”<sup>132</sup>

On the other hand, some objects seemed to connect at a human level in such a way as to make sense of the past in quite a different way from that of contemporary traditional history. Such objects evoked human sympathy as they tended to be those that held some imprint of a human presence and activity. An interesting literary example is in Dickens’ description of Pompeii, which he visited in 1844. “We see at every turn the little familiar tokens of human habitation and every day pursuits; the chaffing of the bucket-rope in the stone rim of the exhausted well; the track of carriage-wheels in the pavement of the street; the marks of drinking-vessels on the stone counter of the wine shop.”<sup>133</sup> By drawing attention to the impact of human activity on the surroundings, Dickens emphasised the reality of human presence very much more powerfully than by merely describing the buildings. Fanny Trollope was also impressed by the immediacy of the Pompeii ruins compared with those in Rome. “I shall never feel sent back to ages past by the columns and pediments of ancient Rome as I did by the shop counters, the oil jars and the ovens of Pompeii.”<sup>134</sup> It seems to have been much the same evidence of human activity that had impressed the London antiquarian Syer Cuming when he talked about the remains discovered in the mud on the Thames embankment. They seemed to indicate that there had been a battle between Celtic and Roman forces in the area. The artefacts included examples of armour and even some skulls, but what finally brought the scene to life for Cuming was the discovery of a sandal. “Though the tides of eighteen centuries have swept the warrior’s footprint from the shore, the covering of that foot has again been gathered from the deep: so that if we have not

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<sup>131</sup> Sir Edward Landseer painted Victoria and Albert in their costumes. The historical accuracy of the armour and weapons used at the tournament was worked out with the aid of Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, the leading expert on medieval weapons and an active member of the BAA.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p.435.

<sup>133</sup> Dickens, Pictures from Italy (1845).

<sup>134</sup> Cited in Liversidge and Edwards (1996) p.15.



yet confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ... we have at least sufficient to transmute that which at first loomed as an ill-defined shadow, into a visible and tangible reality.”<sup>135</sup> It is interesting that it should be the sandal and not the skulls that had touched Cuming’s imagination. The contemporary interest in phrenology had meant that skulls had become like any other object, a subject for scientific measurement and as a result they had been rendered less suggestive as triggers for the imagination.<sup>136</sup> Cuming’s article included a detailed description of a skull including measurements. He described it as having ‘an ebonized appearance’ and so it is hardly surprising that he could not relate to it emotionally.

The same detachment did not seem to apply to whole skeletons, often discovered in circumstances suggesting a violent end, and therefore inviting an explanation. Again Pompeii provided many of the most powerful examples, whose presence can be detected even where it was not mentioned. Giuseppe Fiorelli, who was in charge of the excavations, devised a method of pouring liquid plaster into the hollows left by disintegrated remains, including human ones. The resulting plaster casts were electrifying, as a writer in the Quarterly Review pointed out. “A more ghastly and painful, yet deeply interesting and touching object it is difficult to conceive. We have death itself moulded and cast-the very last struggle, the final agony brought before us. They tell their story, with a horrible dramatic truth that no sculptor could ever reach.”<sup>137</sup>

Although there were no comparable casts in Britain, there were several skeletons that evoked similar imaginative descriptions. When Thomas Wright, excavating the Roman remains at Wroxeter, found three skeletons in a hypocaust, he speculated on the circumstances surrounding their deaths. “In the midst of the massacre of Roman Uriconium, these three persons, perhaps two terrified women and an old

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<sup>135</sup> B.A.A.J Vol. XIV, p.330.

<sup>136</sup> Cuming identified the Celtic skulls: “a long oval form with elevated backs, and rather depressed foreheads” and the Roman skulls: “shorter proportions and thicker substance”. (Ibid. p.238).

<sup>137</sup> Q.R. (1864) p.332. There were several graphic descriptions, for instance this of a woman of about twenty-five. “Her linen head-dress falling over her shoulders like that of a matron in a Roman statue, can still be distinguished. She had fallen on her side overcome by the heat and gasses; but a terrible struggle seems to have preceded her last agony. One arm is raised in despair; the hands are clenched convulsively. Her garments are gathered up on one side, leaving exposed a limb of beautiful shape. So perfect a mould of it has been formed by the soft and yielding mud, that the cast would seem to be taken from an exquisite work of Greek art.”

man, had sought to conceal themselves by creeping into the hypocaust and perhaps they were suffocated there. Or when the house was delivered to the flames, the falling rubbish may have blocked up the outlet, so as to make it impossible for them to leave.”<sup>138</sup> Another skeleton had been found near Colchester lying face down and with a patera beside it. Rev. Jenkins appears to have used the very scanty evidence afforded by the artefact as the basis upon which he could create a fanciful tale. “From the emblem of his office, and the most mortal aversion with which the Britons regarded the priests of Claudius, we may almost imagine this skeleton to have been that of a priest, who in his attempt to escape during the insurrection, had been seized by the Britons and buried alive.”<sup>139</sup>

There was frequently a tension between the antiquarians’ search for historical accuracy, based on evidence, and their desire to tell a story based on their emotional responses to ordinary people from the past. Wright’s description of the violent end of Uriconium included references to a ‘dreadful massacre’ and survivors ‘dragged away to captivity’. Given the antiquarians’ comparative lack of excavation skills, Wright can only have had two sources for his account: his imagination and the early Christian texts by Gildas and Bede, written many years after the events they describe. Wright himself had this to say about events as described by Gildas. “The whole story, built apparently on some slight notes in an old continental chronicler, displays the most profound ignorance of the period to which it relates.”<sup>140</sup> But the emotive way in which he describes the events owes much to Gildas, who was primarily responsible for the view that Roman Britain had met a violent end as a result of raids by the Picts. Presumably, in spite of his doubts about the accuracy of the text, its contents resonated with his own emotional response to the human remains he had encountered in the ruins at Wroxeter.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Wright (1860) p.39. It is interesting to wonder how much influence the fate of Pompeii had on the form of Wright’s description.

<sup>139</sup> Rev. Jenkins *Archaeologia* Vol. XXIX (1842) p.14.

<sup>140</sup> Wright (2<sup>nd</sup>, ed. 1861) p.397

<sup>141</sup> Current archaeological thought is that far from being destroyed, there was in fact considerable rebuilding at the site after the Roman period. Gildas had a strong ‘political’ purpose in writing as he was arguing that the Anglo Saxons were ‘God’s punishment on the British’ for their wickedness. See White and Barker (1998)



## The Object As Narrative

One of the main uses served by objects was the role they played in helping to create a narrative of the past, to tell a story. Accounts of excavations and artefacts, however ‘scientifically’ accurate, could appear to be very dull and dry. But the associations brought to mind by particular objects helped to provide a structure – what Rev. Massie called a peg – around which the imagination could weave a story. And a story is what many people, both then and now, want history to provide. As I suggested in Chapter 7, on National Identity, people looked to the past to help to explain where they came from, and how. They wanted examples of the characters and events that had helped to create their locality and their nation. Objects were one of the means through which such stories could be created. Their very physicality was a direct link with the past and could be used to create a sense of that past.<sup>142</sup> Professor Marsden emphasised this characteristic of objects when he suggested that the associations they evoked were the greatest pleasure offered by archaeology. “The object before us, formed a part and parcel in scenes of bygone days, and Imagination presents the actors to the mind’s eye.”<sup>143</sup> He illustrated his argument by describing a scene brought to mind by the chance find of a coin. “The coin is seen at once to be early British and Roman. From that moment the scene around you, however tame and uninteresting it may have been before, starts into life with a newly created interest. On a sudden, the hollows around are peopled with bivouacking legions and you hear the clangour of the litus and the tuba. In the stream that winds around the foot of the declivity, shaggy horses laden with trappings are quenching their thirst. In the midst stands the Praetorium encircled by the banners. The white sand that glitters among the fern, has rubbed bright many a dingy breast plate; and the turf beneath our feet has been moistened with the crimson stain of bloodshed, by invaders fighting for conquest and sturdy barbarians standing up in defence of their homes and liberty. From yonder hill, the swarthy crowd rushed down furiously upon their opponents, in the hope of surprising them off their guard. At a word every Roman is at his place. A few

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<sup>142</sup> Objects that were either known to be, or thought to be associated with particular characters from the past were especially valued. For instance Lee was reported as owning a table and chairs belonging to Sir Thomas Moore (*M.M.*, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1851) whilst a purse in the Charles Museum in Canterbury was said to have belonged to Oliver Cromwell. (*B.A.A.J.* Vol. XV (1859)).

<sup>143</sup> *Trans. E.A.S.* Vol. I (1858) p.14.

fierce struggles ensue and then the combat begins to slacken. The barbarians retreat in confusion from the field. In a brief spate however the rout is ended and the returning legion pile up their blood-stained arms."<sup>144</sup>

I quote his description in full because it is a good example of the sort of vivid imaginative narratives that were prompted by simple objects. Marsden gives no details of the coin. He merely observes that it was ancient. But its discovery allowed him to bring together a whole range of other sources and impressions through which he created a story tied to a particular landscape, a particular concern of the provincial archaeologist. The stimulus was the coin, but the story that arose was a great deal larger than the whole. It illustrates one advantage of an object as opposed to a text as historical evidence, namely that it does allow the observer's imagination free rein. In effect it is the observer telling the story rather than the text.

Colchester is an example of a place in which the ambiguity of the remains and the vividness of what little was known could constitute a powerful stimulus to the imagination. For many local antiquarians, the search for clues to substantiate and dramatise the well-known stories was at least as important as historical accuracy. In fact it could be argued that it was even more important, as Rev. Jenkins' response to the skeleton, illustrates. Roach Smith was obviously aware of the dangers when he warned, "This town is so full of ancient remains, so pregnant with historical connections and associations, that it is difficult to avoid being led into an essay, which however entertaining it might be made, would be out of place in our present proceedings."<sup>145</sup> But in spite of this warning, the Colchester antiquarians continued to use the most mundane objects as evidence to support their imaginative pictures of the past. When Roach Smith, in his capacity as an expert, expressed the opinion that some finds from a burial site, which were thought to be Roman, were in fact late Iron Age from Gaul, local antiquarians were displeased. Wire tried to explain to Smith why his opinion had so annoyed his fellow townsmen. "Had you stated that the ninth legion was routed and the infantry slain by Boudicea: that the common soldiers bodies were gathered and burnt on the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p.14-15. To emphasis his point Marsden also quoted a poem by Wordsworth, 'Upon some Roman antiquities discovered at Bishopstone, Herefordshire'. I have found an almost identical passage to Marsden's in an article in the Q.R. September 1843 p.377. The article is a review of books on coins by Cardwell and Akerman and is anonymous.

<sup>145</sup> B.A.A.J. Vol. II (1846) p.30 "Our present proceedings" being a more factually based and scientific archaeology.



Druidical altars; that the remains were afterwards collected... and that the ox head irons were the trestles of the legions camp tables and... the iron bar was the staff of their standard... then you would not have given offence.”<sup>146</sup>

The story of Roman Colchester was uniquely well documented by the ancient historians. Other parts of Britain, where the Roman occupation had been less eventful, were largely ignored. In Caerleon, for instance, inscriptions were the only form of written evidence, and therefore the antiquarians had to rely on objects to re-create the fortress and the town. The way in which they went about this helps to illustrate the central part played by objects in such imaginative re-constructions. A paper given by the Rev. Jones at the 1849 AGM is a good example. He told his audience, “We are treading in the steps and repeating the actions of those renowned people who were the intermediate link between the ancient and the modern world.”<sup>147</sup> He put a particular emphasis on the activities of the Romans, so that instead of describing the artefacts, he describes Roman people using them. “You have but to add the stately conqueror to his massive column, the purse to the coin, the garment to the pin and clasp and the young damsel to her water jar and you see the city camp of the second Augustan Legion.”<sup>148</sup>

By stressing the everyday objects and activities of the people in the past, Rev. Jones creates a picture of domestic life far removed from games and battles. It is a story of the ordinary and domestic told through “the imperishable materials of stone, pottery and precious metals”, rather than a story of rulers and battle as told in the classic texts. It was also the story of Roman Britain rather than Imperial Rome; a story that could only be told through the study of objects.

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<sup>146</sup> Wire letter to Roach Smith, 5<sup>th</sup>, June 1851

<sup>147</sup> M.M., 14<sup>th</sup>, July 1849

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION**

“Roman experience gave the Victorians not a coherent model or example, but a rich and flexible vocabulary for public and private debate, capable of expressing almost every side of almost any argument.”<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis I have argued that the Victorians’ re-discovery of Roman Britain was important because it represented a shift in the way in which the British past, and in particular its relationship with Rome, was conceptualised. The antiquarians used the material remains of over 400 years of Roman occupation to create a rich and detailed image of ‘Roman Britain’ in which the Romano-Britons were allowed to emerge from the shadow cast by the Roman presence. In some respects, this new version of Roman Britain was a nineteenth century creation, in which the rather scanty material remains were used as triggers for the antiquarians’ imagination, enabling them to construct a Roman past to suit the purposes of contemporary society. The very scarcity of textual evidence, rather than being a drawback, allowed the antiquarians to call upon ‘the rich and flexible vocabulary’ of the whole Roman tradition and to use it in discussions and debates about national origins, social organisations and the social and professional standing of individuals.

Just as a Roman writer such as Tacitus had used Rome’s encounters with the native British to discuss political and social events in the city of Rome in the first century C.E., so the British antiquarians in the nineteenth century used those same encounters to debate contemporary issues. But in the process, the analogies were reversed. The imperial power was British, not Roman, and the subject race was no longer British but the native populations of India and Africa.<sup>2</sup> What both the Roman and the British accounts had in common was the use of conventional descriptions, based on rhetorical stereotypes, such as ‘the freedom loving Celts’ or ‘the civilising Romans’ (what I referred to in an earlier chapter as ‘shorthand’). Rather than being objective observations, these phrases were used, as Vance suggests, as devices to further internal debate by setting up comparisons through

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<sup>1</sup> Vance (1997) p.270.

<sup>2</sup> Cannadine has argued that the crucial divisions were not so much racial as based on class and therefore the ‘native other’ included the working class in Britain. See Cannadine (2001) pp.5 & 6.



which incidents and individuals could be evaluated. For modern historians they are a useful source of information about the society that invented and used them, although I would argue that other periods, for example the mediaeval, were used in much the same way by the Victorians.

Throughout much of the eighteenth century, classical Rome had been used as a model for many aspects of social and cultural life in Britain. Ownership of Roman artefacts and a knowledge of the classical texts could be seen as proof of the owner's right to be a member of the ruling class and indicative of their owner's standing within the community. Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that this inheritance should assume such cultural significance and should become an important arena, within which various types of authority could be contested. The *frequent references to the civilising effect of the Roman occupation*, and the claim that the British had inherited that civilising role, suggest *the contemporary belief* that Britain had progressed and now had a similar mission to carry civilisation overseas.

In Britain itself, the debates were more complicated and revolved around questions of ownership of the Roman artefacts which were perceived as the 'markers' of civilised living. There were the overt questions about who had both the right and the duty to preserve the vestiges of the national past and the best way in which this could be achieved. But there were also covert differences between individuals and groups, in which the classical inheritance was used as a symbol of the right to rule of some, and the exclusion of others. In effect, these contests were about the re-distribution of authority and influence at both national and local level. They were between the established ruling groups and an increasingly important and vocal middle class. The debates were essentially about shifting authority at a time of rapid social change. It is probably no coincidence that they occurred at the same time as other issues, such as the extension of the franchise and central government's involvement in local affairs.<sup>3</sup> They involved questions of

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<sup>3</sup> The failure of the 1832 Reform Bill to bring about far reaching reform had led to pressure for an extension of the franchise through out the 1840s and 1850s. The 1867 Reform Act extended the vote to many more householders. The risk to health posed by poor urban living conditions was forcing the government to become more pro-active and involved in local affairs through such measures as the 1848 Public Health Act.

participation and ownership that were at the root of claims to authority and the right to rule.

As the traditional ruling groups felt their authority being challenged, they reacted by closing ranks, even in those areas that were not directly political. A collection of objects could signify ownership, not just of the objects themselves, but of the history of a particular locality, suggesting a link between the locality, the objects and the owner. From Camden in the sixteenth century to Victorians of the nineteenth century, antiquarians had been concerned with the topography and landscape of their piece of countryside. By their searching and minute examination of all the features of that landscape, they identified themselves with every hedge and ditch, and through such intimate acquaintance, could claim an identity with the land that went beyond ownership. They were the land and its history personified, and the collection was the embodiment of that identity.

For local groups in mid-Victorian Britain, anxious to maintain their authority, the study of the past appeared to confirm their position, as it seemed to demonstrate continuity between the past and the present. In those areas where there had been a significant Roman presence, familiarity with the classical stories and accounts made the Romans seem almost contemporary, especially where there were allegedly identifiable connections with well-known figures. The more magnificent the part that the locality had played in past national events, the greater the glory attached to the current elite. Even in those areas where there was no textual evidence, artefacts, such as the mosaics in Cirencester, were able to conjure up a wealth of associations through their likeness to other examples in the Roman world. The sense of familiarity was based on an assumed similarity between the Romans and contemporary individuals: a similarity that rested, above all else on their literacy.

Local antiquarians were not interested in philosophical theories of history; above all else they wanted to tell the local story. In order to do so, they were willing to consider all types of evidence, both textual and material, and to take account of local traditions and myths, however improbable. To use Dietler's description, they were the guardians of "the collective memory." There was more than a hint of idealisation in their attitudes, a sense that in some lost 'golden age' society had



been ordered and everyone had known their place. This parochial and inward looking approach to the study of the past, reinforced by the socially exclusive inclinations of the local groups, successfully fended off both the lower classes in the locality and those antiquarians and historians with more general interests. Although lip-service might be paid to both, essentially the local antiquarians used their groups to maintain their social position and confirm their identity as the rightful rulers.

Broadly, my detailed examination supports Levine's more general work. However the greater detail of my study has enabled me to examine some of the complex processes underlying the social organisations. My research would suggest that the social functions of these local groups were arguably even more important than the study of the past. The published books and journals give a rather false impression of the interests of "the historically invisible majority" as, without exception, they are written by a small number of the most active. Even a prominent figure, like William Wire in Colchester, was inhibited from writing publicly about his interests and it is only through pure chance that his journal and letters have survived. However, the fact that they did survive, allowed a clearer picture of some of the underlying factors at work to emerge. This would seem to suggest that it is only through examining individuals in specific situations and in as much detail as possible, that a deeper understanding can be achieved. Historical research that seeks to understand the activities and motivation of individuals and groups in the past has to approach the task through a process which is rather similar to peeling an onion: as one layer is stripped away, so another is revealed presenting even more methodological problems.

Those individuals who were not accepted into the local societies, for social reasons, or who had wider intellectual horizons, had to look elsewhere for stimulation and companionship. They were outside the ruling elite and in some cases they sought to use their interest in the past as a way of earning their living and gaining social and intellectual recognition among like others. They wanted to become professional historians. Unlike the local antiquarians, who identified themselves by their association with a particular area and their social connections, these would-be professionals were specialists and used their knowledge to gain acceptance in the metropolitan world of learning and science. So, as a result of

being spurned by one elite group, they effectively created or joined another. The change was symbolised by their use of the term 'archaeologist' rather than antiquarian to identify themselves and their activities.

In the years after 1860, the term 'amateur' acquired a distinctly pejorative connotation, as this comment by the Roman archaeologist, Haverfield in 1911 suggests. "It is a peculiar result of our dominant classical education, which is after all, a general and not a specialising education, that in such branches of science as history or literature, the average Englishman is comparatively indifferent to accurate and scientific training, and practically believes that an untaught and unprepared writer can produce first-rate work by his intelligence."<sup>4</sup> It is therefore ironic that the current, popular image of the Romans is not dissimilar to that envisioned by the local antiquarians in the middle of the nineteenth century. Today's popular archaeology books, and in particular television programmes, which attempt to link our world with that of the Romans, are still based on the premise that the Romans and ourselves are essentially similar and that contemporary civilisation is built upon Roman foundations. Indeed the very images conjured up by the term 'Roman' today are much as they might have been in 1850, namely the Games, the Coliseum and a well-organised army marching to conquest along straight roads. Significantly, just as in the 1850s, these images owe as much to the city of Rome itself as they do to Roman Britain. And again, as in 1850, the estimation of the Romans similarity to ourselves is at odds with some of these images. Perhaps what these developments demonstrate is that people will continue to look to history to provide a story that will help them to make sense of their own experience in any given place and time. The current popularity of genealogical and local history would seem to support this view. It would also seem to vindicate the antiquarian's activity.

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<sup>4</sup> Haverfield (1911) p.xii.



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## **UNPUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES**

### **Cheshire Record Office**

**Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society Minute Book**

**Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society Accessions Book**

### **Cirencester Public Library**

**Minute Book of the Cirencester Library Committee 1836-1847.**

### **Cirencester Museum**

**Buckman's plan and layout of the original museum.**

**Contents of the Cirencester Museum in 1856.**

**Cirencester Museum Visitor Book 1856**

### **Essex Museum Service**

**Colchester Archaeological Society Minute Book 1850-1852**

**Colchester Museum Accessions Book 1846-1850**

**William Wire Journal**

### **Essex Record Office**

**William Wire Letter Book**

### **Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association**

**Caerleon Archaeological Association Minute Book 1847-1860**

**The exact location of these and all other primary sources are noted in the references.**



## ILLUSTRATIONS



Plate I





Plate II

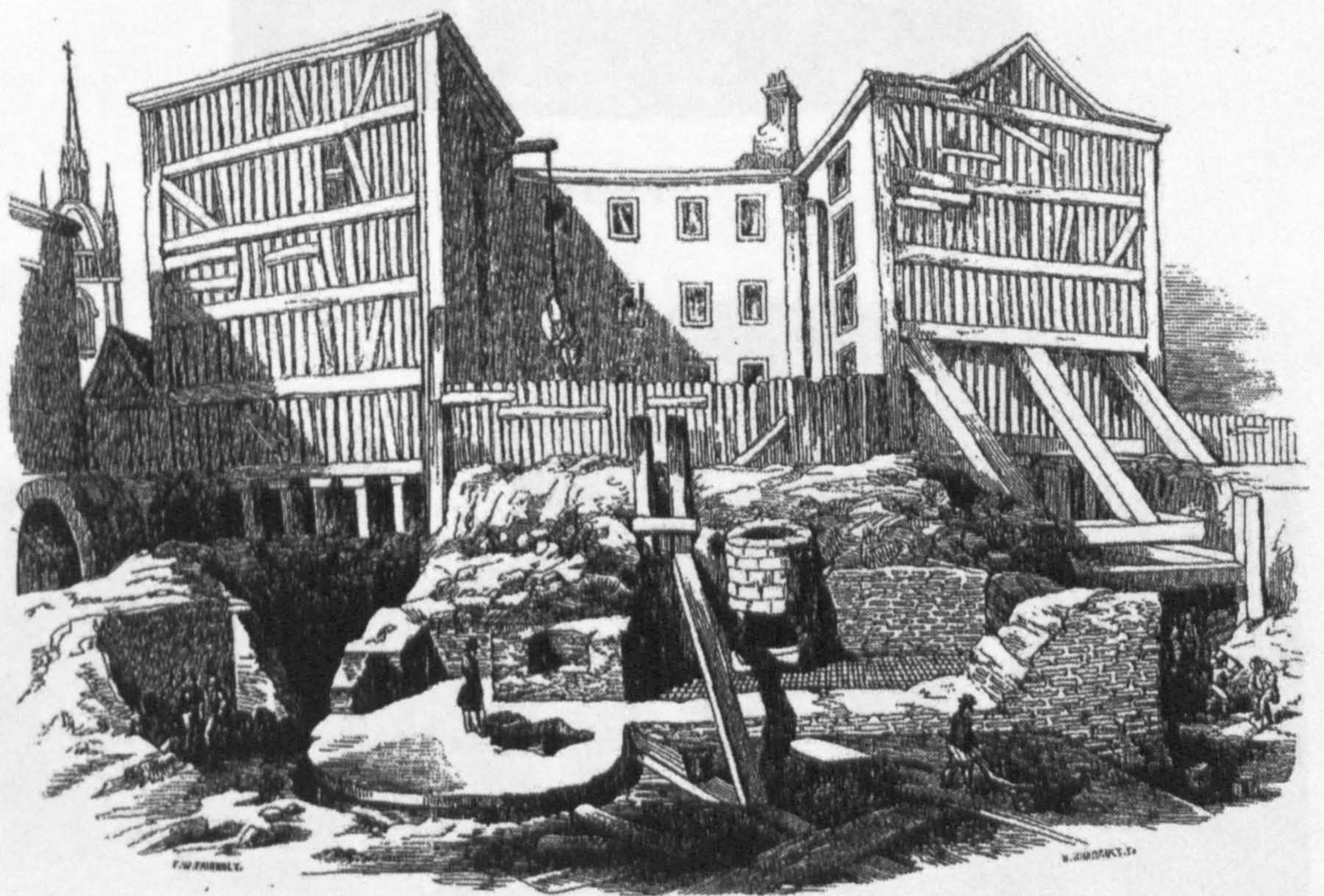


Plate III





Plate IV



Plate V





DISCOVERY OF A ROMAN TERRAZZED PAVEMENT, IN CIRENCESTER.

## Plate VI

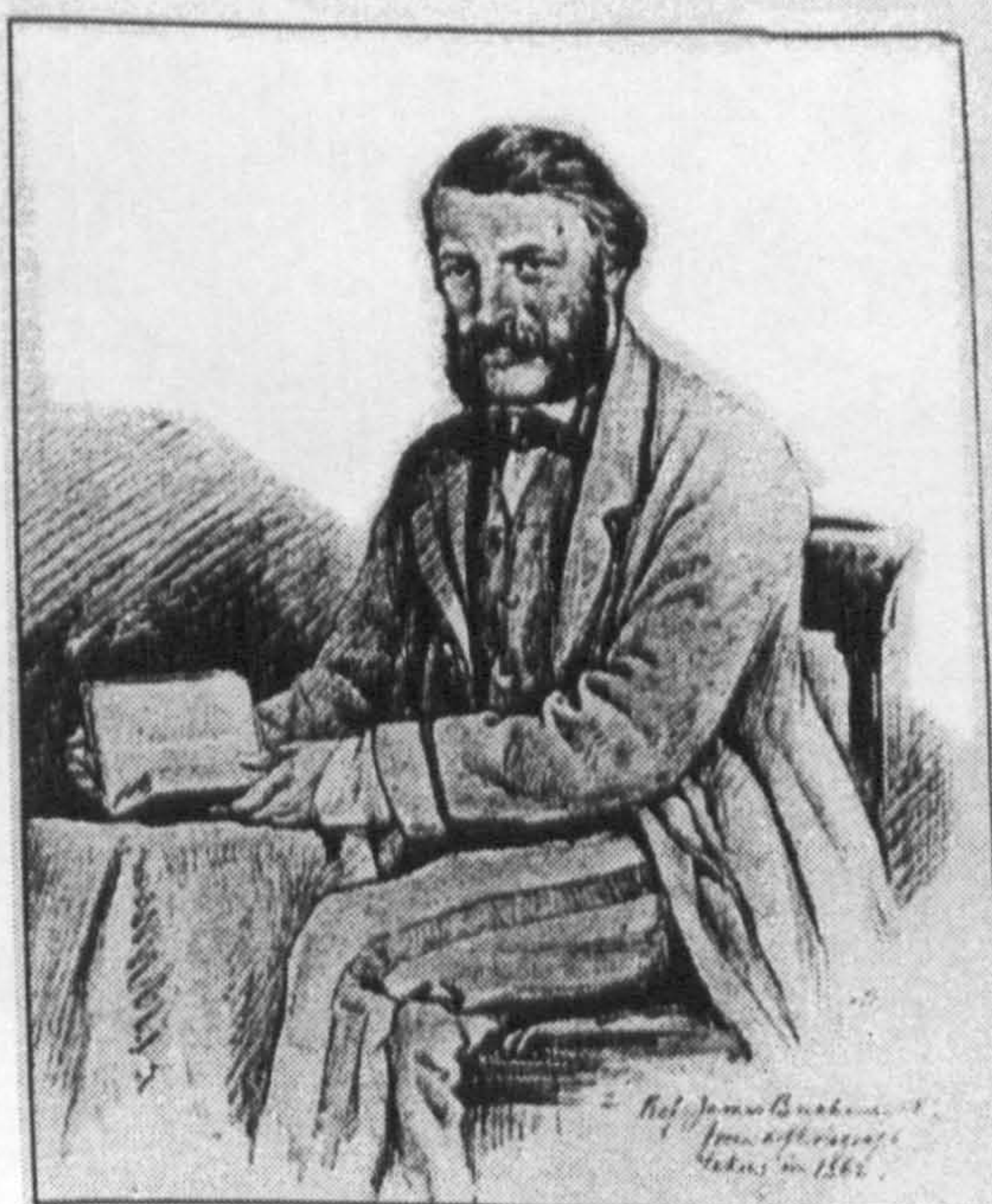
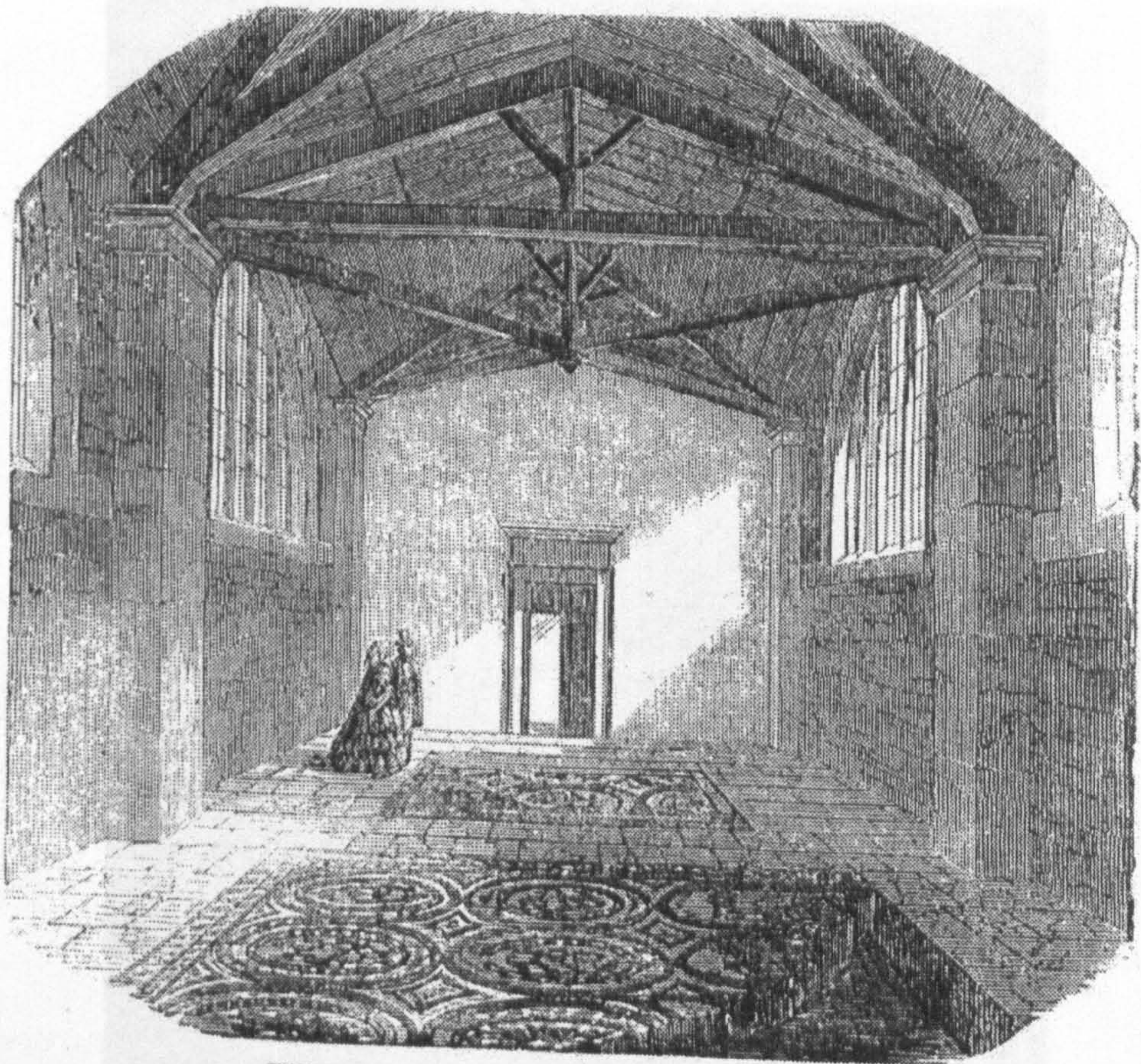


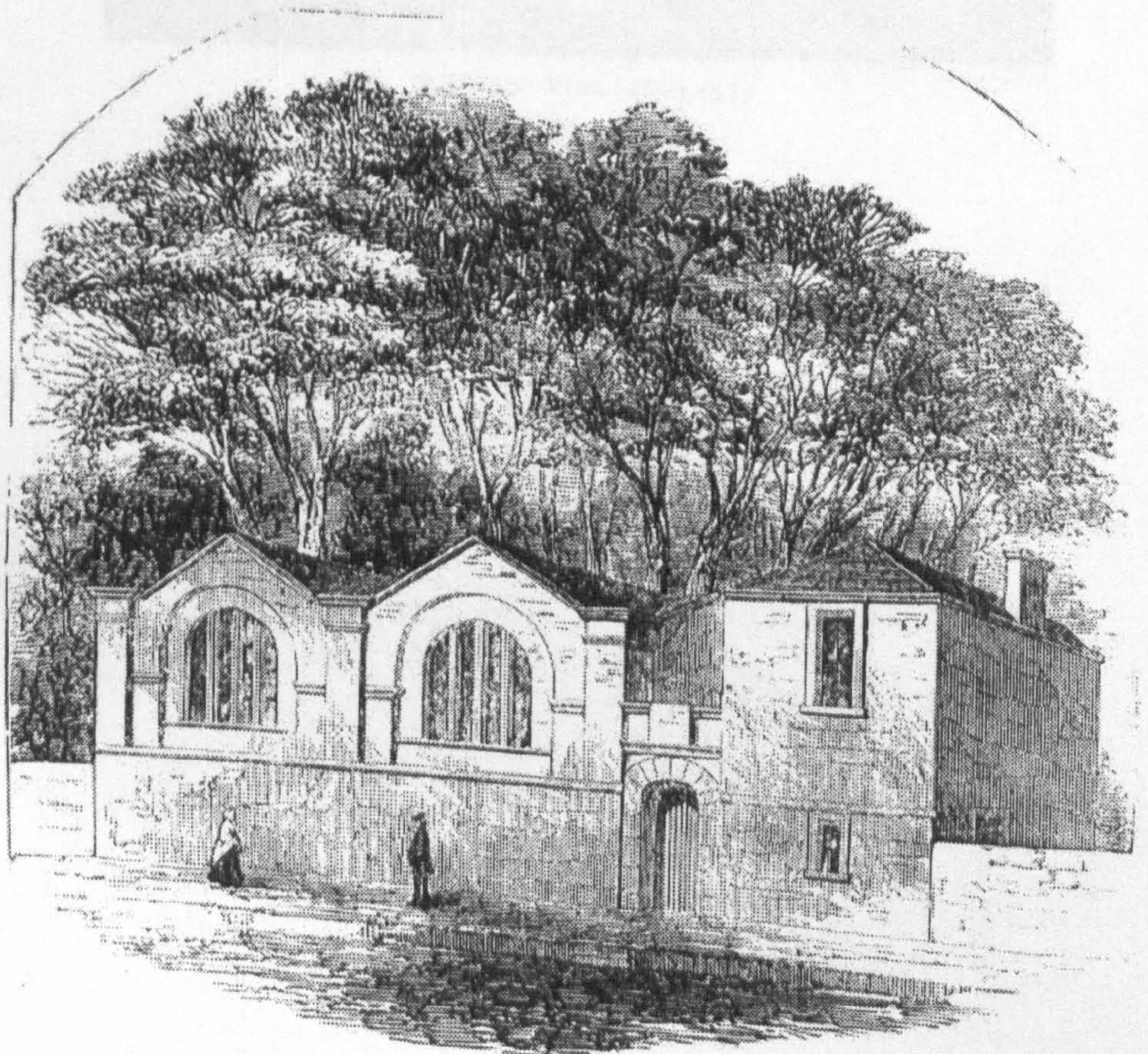
Plate 11 James Buckman, Professor of Geology, Botany, Rural Economy and Natural History 1848-62

## Plate VII





THE ROMAN TESSELATED PAVEMENT, AT CIRENCESTER.



MUSEUM FOR THE ROMAN TESSELATED PAVEMENT, AT CIRENCESTER.





WILLIAM WIRE (1804-57)  
(See Chapter XIII)

Plate IX



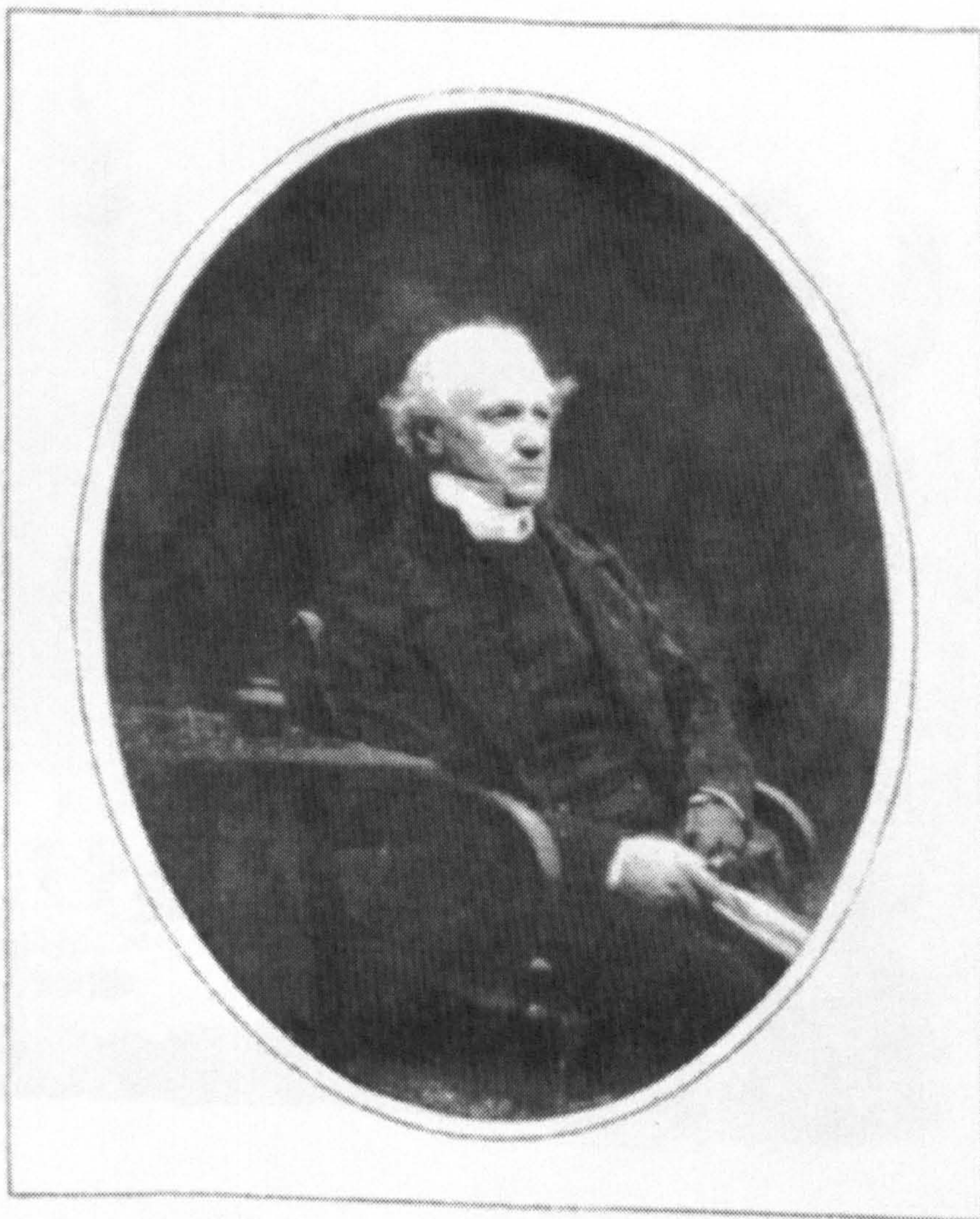


Plate X





ANCIENT BRITONS.

Plate XI





Plate XII



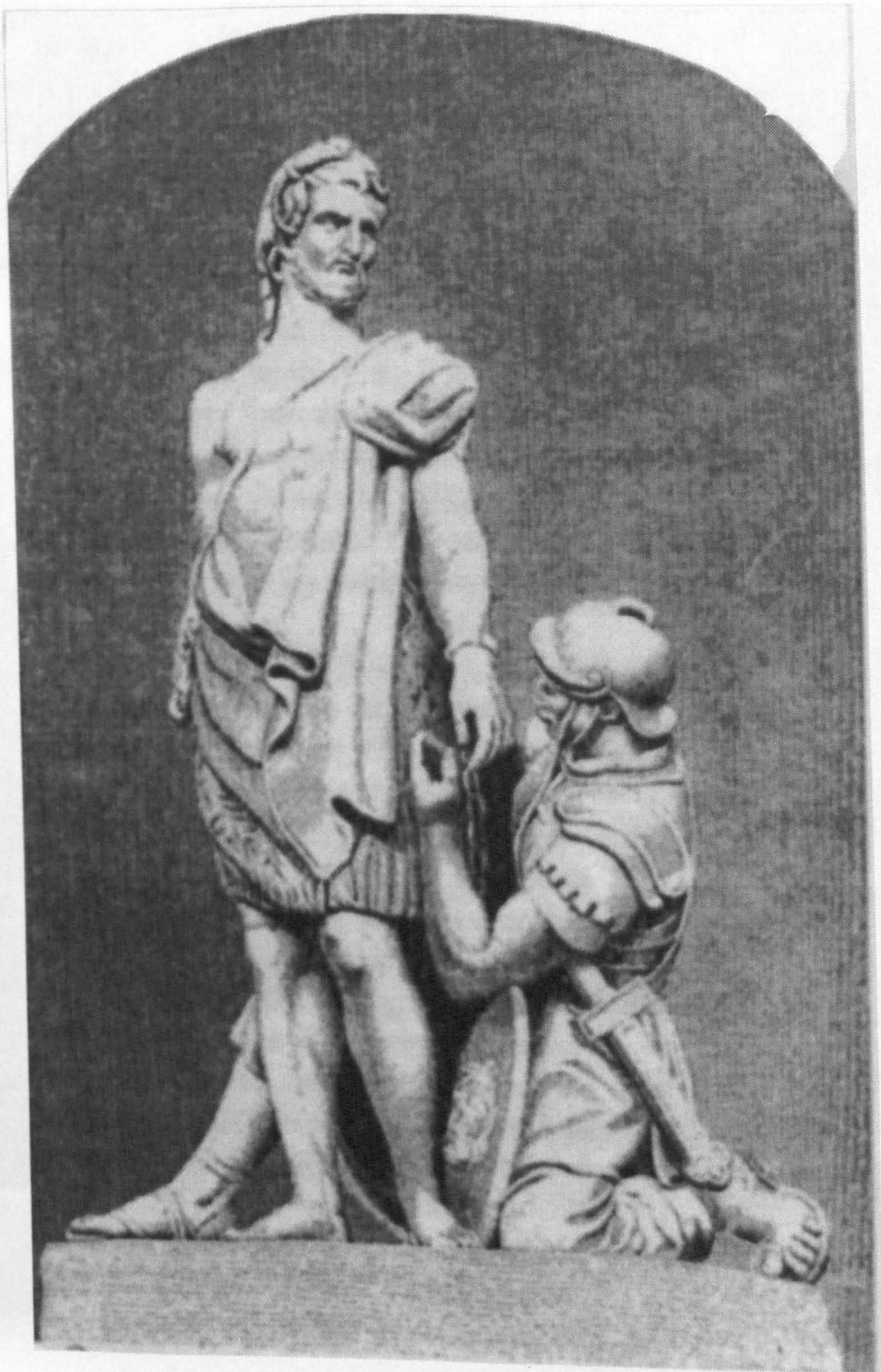


Plate XIII



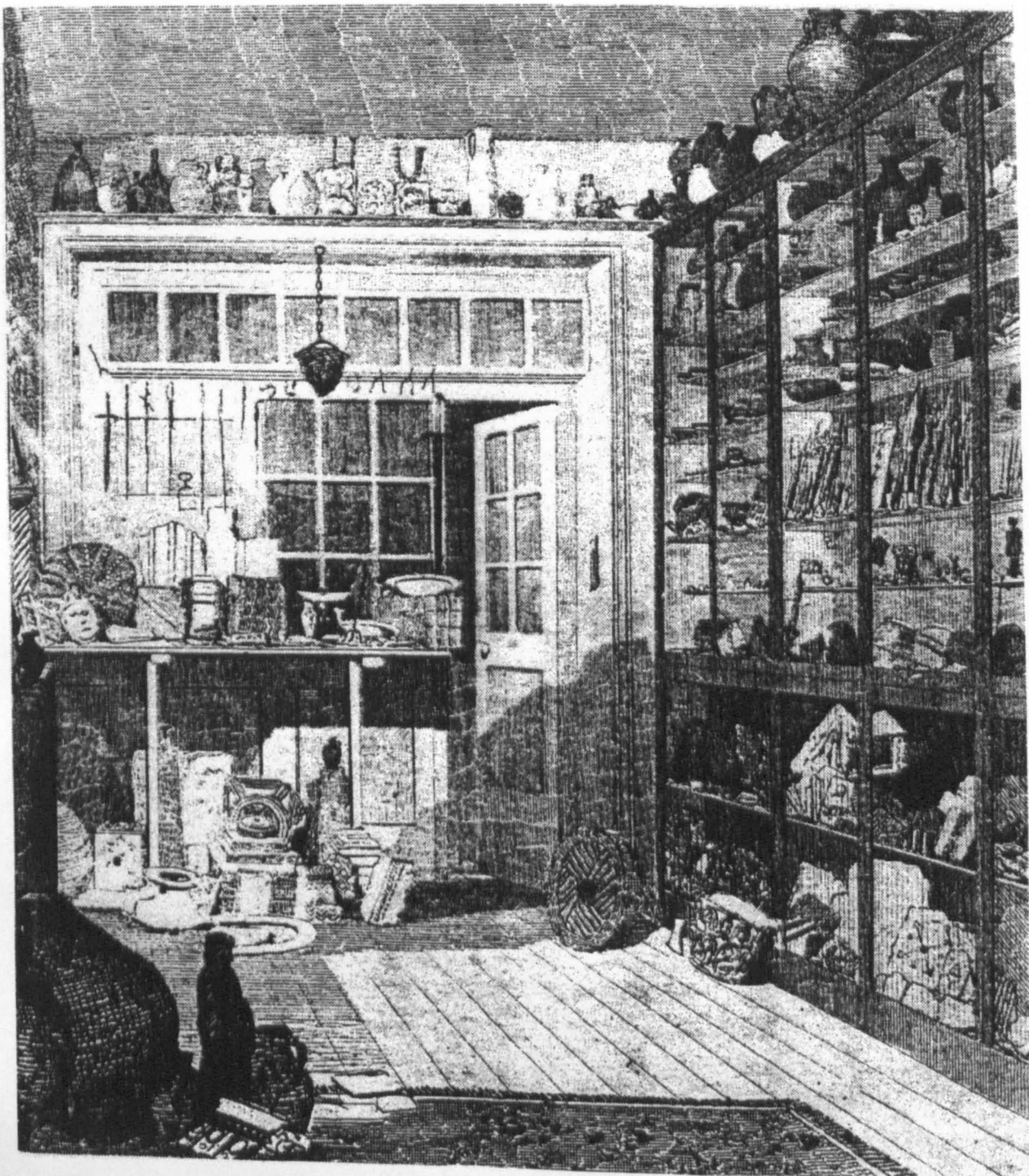


Plate XIV